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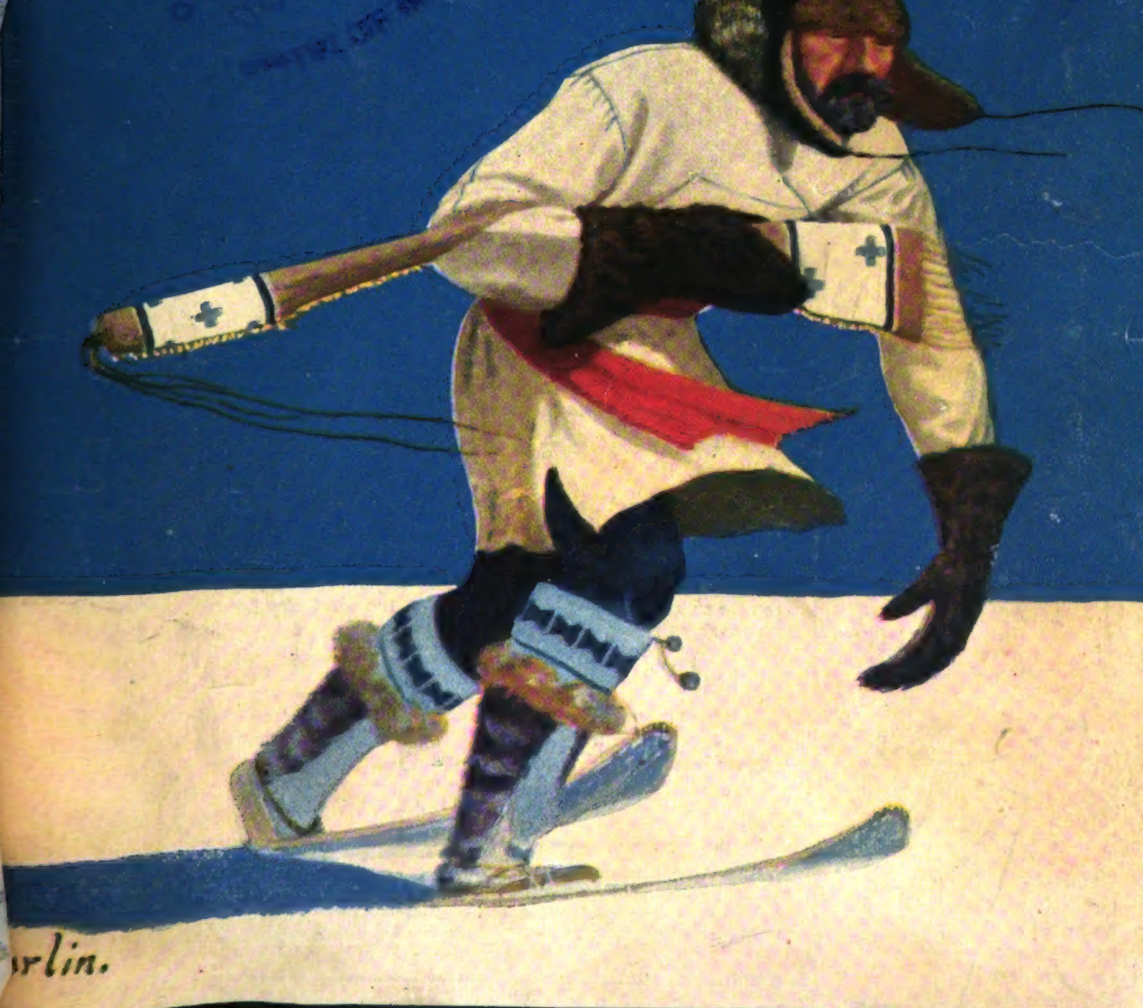

ginning "FORAKER'S FOLLY

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Everybody's

NUMBER FIVE NOVEMBER, 1921 VOLUME XLV

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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Looking Forward to December

SOME time ago we promised that hereafter the work of Honoré Willsie would appear serially in EVERYBODY'S. Since that announcement you have had the opportunity to read "Desert Justice," "The Pinto Stallion," and in this issue (page 39) "Find the Maverick." But the best of her stories—perhaps the best short story she has ever written—is still to come. It is called "Breaking the Blue Roan," and it has all the ingredients that go into the making of good fiction—strong tragedy, genuine humor and sentiment exquisitely handled. And before long we shall be announcing a new serial by Mrs. Willsie—a novel that will make people sit up and think. Meantime you will be depriving yourself of a great pleasure if you do not read "Breaking the Blue Roan."

December EVERYBODY'S—November 15th

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Who Is Dr. Goodrich?

DR. GOODRICH is the newest scientific detective—in fact, *the new* scientific detective. Not long ago we read of war-ships being steered from a distance by wireless, and of automobiles being controlled in the same way. Imagine motor-cars being guided along the road without a hand at the wheel!

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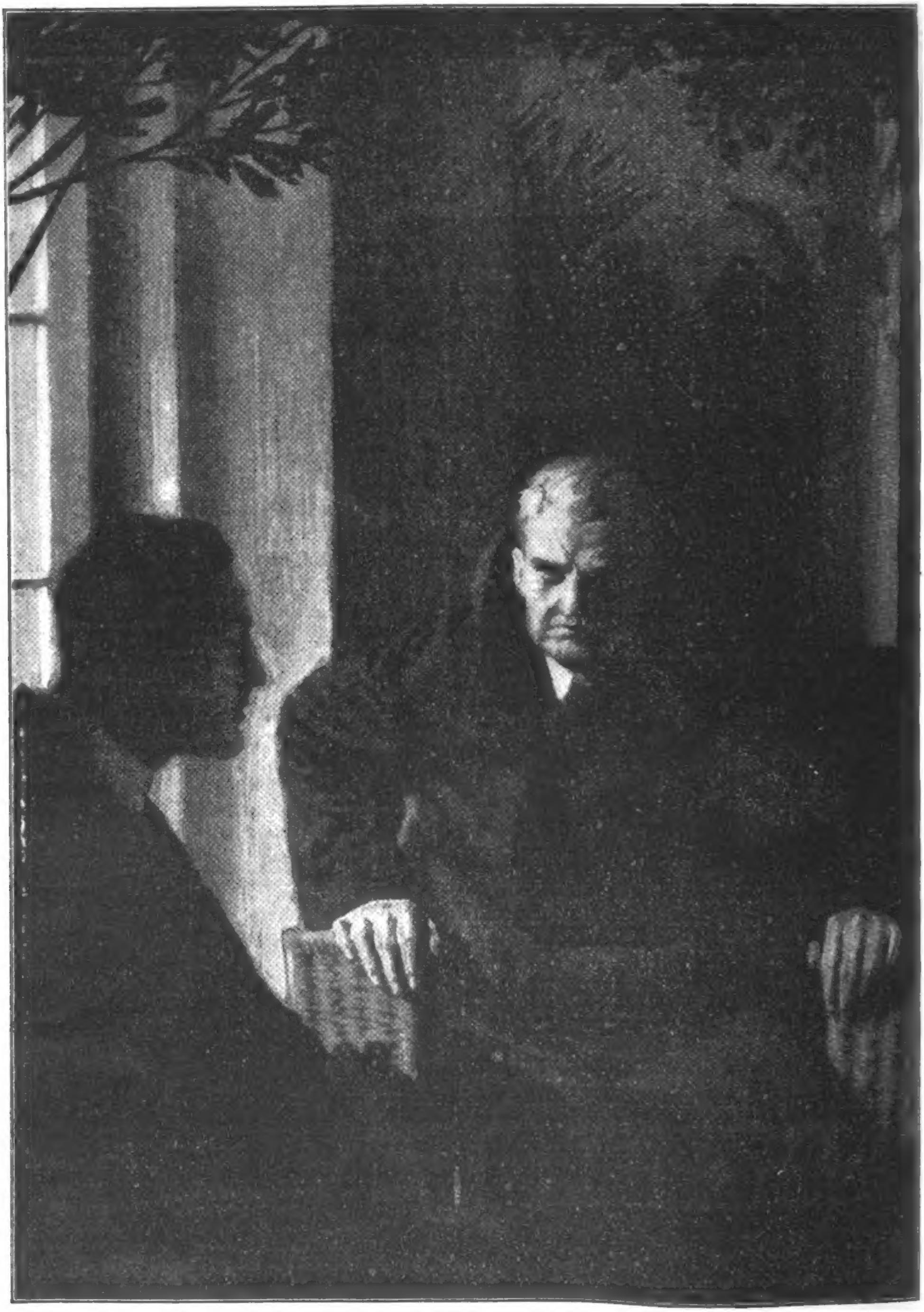
The Phantom Auto

By Stoddard Goodhue

Will appear in the next issue of *Everybody's*

THE amazingly varied stores of knowledge upon which Dr. Goodrich draws in the course of his investigations are authentic. The scientific tests that he utilizes are authentic tests. The statements of fact that he makes regarding laboratory methods are dependable statements, in nowise perverted for the uses of fiction. The feats of seeming wizardry done with test-tube and microscope are valid, not imaginary. His stories give us the scientific truths of the future in the guise of fiction.

December *Everybody's*—out November 15th



"You come to me for what you call a start an' what my daddy'd call a finish," said the old man. "You, with your six feet, your hunderd-eighty pounds of youth, your strong back an' good eye, an' your education—you who're fitted for harder work than any of us—an' now you don't want to muss up your hands."

Timber's Tragic Story—The Struggle between the Destroyer and the Conserver—A Red-Blooded Novel of To-day

FORAKER'S FOLLY

Written by a Man Born and Bred in a Vast Lumber District, Who Loves the Forest and Its People, Whose Indignation at Witnessing the Destruction of his Playground Inspired This Work, Which Comes First-Hand and from the Heart

A Serial in Five Parts

By Harold Titus

Illustrations by R. K. Ryland

A WHITE Florida moon hung low over the river, flanked—for Luke Taylor and his son John—by a yellow pine and a moss-bearded oak. The night was mild and young John was dressed in summer clothes; but Luke sat drawn into his mink-lined overcoat as if the outlook from the wide veranda of his winter home were of the bleak North instead of the edge of the tropics. His withered hands lay on the arms of the wicker chair and his cold eyes stared straight before him.

"So you think I owe you that, do you?"

John shifted uneasily and ran a big white hand through his light hair. "You see, father, if I'm to have an even start with other men of my sort, it's necessary."

Luke grunted skeptically.

"Of course, I could start out now and find a job, go to work for some of my friends who are no better equipped to hold an advantage over me than I am over them, but who've been—who've had fathers who helped them."

"You mean it's work you don't want?" Luke asked, still watching the river.

"Of course not! I'm not afraid of work; but I don't want to put in the best years of my life grubbing when I might be building."

"A flyin' start—that's what you want, eh?" Luke's blue eyes swung to his son and studied the young face.

"That's it."

"Hum. A flyin' start! And I suppose that's what all you young bucks 're looking for now. You don't want to grub out a foundation; you want that done for you."

The old man drew a long breath. "We never thought of them things," he said with a hint of bitterness. "The start I got—an' I was younger than you are now—was standin' to my waist in the Saginaw, with th' river gone mad with ice an' logs. That wa'n't much like a flyin' start. It was hard toil, until th' water warmed an' the last log was in th' boom. Then it was a summer in th' mills and when the snow came, back to th' woods again.

"Five— Six? Devil himself knows how many years! We didn't count years then; not lads my age. There was time a-plenty. Harmon put me to head th' drive; then I was woods boss, an' later he made me walkin' boss for five camps. Come next fall he took my savin's, and what they bought give me my chance to buy Pine of my own— Pine!" He spoke the word as if it should be capitalized.

He sighed.

"From then on it was a fight against debt an' rivers an' men. I'd learned about men an' rivers when I was dryin' my socks round some other man's stove. I had to learn about debt myself, an' that was all. I did learn, an' I made money. I did things that even old Harmon was afraid to do. I took what other men thought was chances, an' made big on 'em; but they wa'n't chances. I knew that, because I knew about men and rivers an' debt—finally."

"You surely—" began John.

"Wait! It ain't just th' amblin' of an old man. I'm goin' some place. For a long time you've been fixin' for this. I know," nodding fiercely. "I've watched an' waited to see when you'd screw up your nerve." John stirred uneasily, but his father proceeded. "An' what did all that work an' knowledge mean? It meant a fortune!"

WITHIN the house a man with sleek black hair spoke quietly into a desk telephone and Luke jerked his head toward him.

"Rowe, there, can tell you how much it is. I don't even pay attention to that, now. I used to keep my own books, used to be proud to figure that fortune— No longer!" He shook his head and the old mouth set grimly. "I'd give it all, every dollar, every cent; give my credit to th' last dime to be back there again with an ice-cold river huggin' my legs an' a peavy in my hand, gettin' my start, learnin' about men an' wonderin' about debt. I read th' other day about a doctor who makes men young. Paper-talk! But if it was true, if he could make me young again, I'd want to leave all I've made with th' old shell and go back to the beginnin' once more with nothin' but my hands." He eyed his old palms, protruding from the sleeves of the overcoat. "Only—steady hands."

Luke looked again at the moon, now edging toward the pine trees.

"But there's nothin' to go back to, nothin' I care about! Th' Pine that made me dream dreams when I was drivin' the Saginaw's gone. No Michigan White Pine left, which was the only White Pine worth the name! Western— Yes; mixed stands; it ain't the real old cork." He shook his head. "An' such as that—" a contemptuous gesture toward the plume into which the moon drifted. "Counterfeit pine!"

He breathed audibly through his open mouth and turned to glare at his son, who sat motionless.

"Counterfeit! So's my life! They tell me it was th' weeks in ice-water that drives me down here when th' geese comes over Detroit an' keeps me here until the ice is out of the Great Lakes. They tell me it's th' cold of Michigan rivers that's in my bones now. It ain't! I know what it is!"

He wriggled deeper into his fur coat, muttering inarticulately.

"It's somethin' else that's gone, boy. It's Th' Pine! You young bucks ain't what we were. There's nothin' to make your blood jump like a White Pine forest did mine! If I could lose every penny even now, old as I am, but could walk through a stand of real Michigan timber again, I wouldn't be cold. Them days I could sink my ax to th' eye every blow; with a saw gang I could finish my fifteen thousand a day, an' th' days were short, too.

"There was somethin' in that which you bucks can't know. Pine! Pine, standin' there straight an' true, trees thick as hair on a dog, waitin' for good men to come an' get it!"

He seemed to shrink in size as his voice fell. "Gad! It warms me to think about goin' into Pine again!

"Not to make money!" with a sudden cry. "To cut! To drive! To saw it! To see a forest all about you when th' snow flies an' to know that when winter breaks up there'll be sections with nothin' left but tops an' stumps on 'em; to know that it's your hands an' your men's hands that'll do it! There's power in that, boy, because logs build homes an' homes build nations!

"Some flapdoodle old women are callin' us destroyers an' devastators! What was timber for? *They* use it, don't they, while they yell about what we've done! They sob about th' next generation, but why should we care about what's comin'? Didn't Michigan pine build th' corn belt? An' where'd this country be without its grain-lands now? Didn't Michigan Pine build cities that make the country wealthy? Hump!

"What's th' next generation to me? Every generation has it's work to do. Anyhow, look at yourself! Bah! You want to commence to learn some business from th' top down. You want to put on th' roof before you've got the foundation in because you don't want th' rough work. You're th' kind that these old women are worryin' over. I tell you, boy, you an' your like don't deserve worry from anybody, even from old women in pants!"

"That's unfair!" John half rose as he said it and color rushed into his face.

"This has been corked up in me too long, now!" His son settled back. "Unfair, am I? If you think that's unfair, wait until I get through! You come to me for what you call a start an' what my daddy 'd call a finish. You, with your six feet, your hunderd-eighty pounds of youth, your strong back an' good eye, an' a better education that any of us ever had; you who're fitted for harder work than any of us—an' now you don't want to muss up your hands!"

"You don't consider one thing, sir," John said. "You blame me for not doing the way your generation did and you don't stop to think that this is no longer your generation."

"I don't, eh? I don't consider that? You don't consider then, young man, that I'm not only tryin' to give you hell but to include your whole generation, if you're a sample of it! Listen to me—" wriggling erect again—"I come up on a Pennsylvania farm with never enough to wear an' sometimes not enough to eat. I worked from th' time I can remember. When I went to school it was because there was no work to do.

"You come up in a house that, when it was built, was th' finest in all Detroit. You had more clothes in your first ten years than I'd had before you were born. What was spent on your food in one month would 've kept my brothers an' sisters a year, an' I've lost track how many of us there was. You never did a tap for yourself from th' time your mother turned you over to a nurse-girl until you went to college, an' then you lived in a club with a nigger to look after you. You've gone through all th' schools there are, an' what I spent on you would've educated my school district."

He tapped the arm of his chair with a trembling hand. "When you got out of college, I sort of thought maybe you'd start in an' help th' old man out, you bein' th' only child—" a mild disappointment in the tone. "Anyhow, I thought— But you didn't. I had to have somebody, so I hired Rowe; he knows how to work; not like I did, not with an ax, of course, but with his head. Work's all pretty much th' same. He's a good boy; but sometimes it grinds me to think I have to turn my affairs over to some other man's son to run.

"You're as strong as I ever was; you know about things that I never heard of—" voice rising—"but I'm through! I'm goin' on th' back trail again. Now—*you* talk!" and from his tone it was certain that he added in his own thoughts, "if you dare!"

YOUNG John dared. He rose slowly and stood looking down at his father, feet spread, hands in the pockets of his smart coat.

"That's the hardest ride I've ever taken," he said. "It wasn't very pleasant. I wouldn't have taken it this way if I thought you understood. You don't."

Luke grunted.

"If I had been a young man in your generation, I'd have started as you did because that was the way all men began. It was backs and brains that made money then. It isn't that way now."

"What makes money, then?"

"Money." Luke eyed his son, who waited a moment before going on: "Money makes money. The man with money makes money. The man who starts without it now is under as much of a handicap as you would have been if your back had been weak. Your father gave you your back to start with. The fathers of sons to-day gave them money to make a beginning. I don't consider, then, when I ask you to set me up, that I'm asking any more than you expected in your time. A different sort of favor, but it's no greater."

The old man snuggled down into his chair. "Well?"

"That's—that's all, sir."

One withered hand tapped the chair-arm testily. "If I give you money, how do I know you've got sense enough to use it to make more? What've you ever done?"

John shifted one foot slowly. "Well, I was a captain in——"

"Don't make me laugh; I've got a stitch in my side. Captain in th' Quartermaster Corps, eh? An' what else?"

"There hasn't been time for much else."

"Time! Good God, boy, you've been out of th' army most a year! What've you done with that year? Tame women? Yes. Hump! From where I sit you seem to be a pretty capable Turk, or maybe it's my money they want—like you want it. Do you list that with your references—your luck with these flossy young petticoats?" The boy blushed so deeply that it was evident even in the dim light. "An' this little wisp of goldenrod, she seems to have run th' others out. I s'pose you think I owe her something."

"*I* owe Marcia something. That much is true."

"Our women used to put up with hardships, shoulder to shoulder."

"Our women don't do that; they're a different breed."

Inside a telephone-bell whirred.

"Yes, a different breed. You said it there: different. Like you bucks are different." Luke nodded sagely; his mouth was shut, letting his loose cheeks sag over the corners. "You want it in a hurry; all that matters is th' reward. The race don't mean anything."

A sudden resentment rang in that tone. John stirred apprehensively. He did not speak, nor did the old man's lips relax.

THE telephone called again; then steps on the rug and Phillip Rowe crossed the room hurriedly. They heard his voice. "Yes— This is Mr. Taylor's residence— No— This is Mr. Taylor's secretary speaking.

"Secretary!" snorted Luke.

"Give me the message, please—all ready——"

And from Luke: "Bookkeeper! *Bookkeeper!* They've all got their notions."

The French doors were open and John Taylor did not care to continue his discussion under the ears of the sleek Rowe; anyhow, the other was writing hurriedly on a pad. When he was through, he stood up and read the message again, stroking his small mustache thoughtfully.

Luke roused and strained to look over his shoulder. "For me, Rowe?"

"Yes, Mr. Taylor. A telegram from McLellan. I will frame an answer."

He had stepped outside, the paper in his hand. His voice was low, even and assured.

"What was it?"

"About the Blueberry hardwood."

"Oh." Luke sat back, rubbing his nose with a knuckle. "He's looked it up?"

"Yes, sir. There are about three hundred thousand feet left."

"Three hundred thousand!" He looked at Rowe with a decided glitter of rage.

The secretary returned the stare and shook his head slowly. After a moment Luke's gaze wandered as he again rubbed his sharp nose with a thin knuckle. It came to rest on his son's face, enigmatic, speculative, and the old man started slightly. His lips worked.

"Three hundred thousand of hardwood logs," he mumbled, "an' th' price of lumber gone hog-wild—eh!"

He settled back and his hands, palms up, lay relaxed on the chair arms. A queer smile played about his mouth and the wrath died in his eyes.

"Boy, a man's never so apt to be wrong as when he's too sure," he began. Rowe started to withdraw, but Luke's gesture, stayed him. "I don't want to be wrong on this. John an' me, Rowe, have been talkin' business. He's decided it's time he does somethin' to make his — fortune," dryly. "We've had a little argument, which didn't get us much of anywhere. John calculates I owe him somethin' and mebby I do—after hearing what he's had to say to me to-night." There was a streak of grit in the tone, as though he repressed some strong impulse. "He wants a start, a flyin' start—somethin' he can turn over quick an not have to monkey along at hard work and spend the years I did—" He licked his lips and before his disconcerting manner John stirred uneasily.

"John's got a better education than I ever had. He's more sure of himself than I was at his age. He thinks I don't understand him an'—mebby I don't." He wheezed an odd laugh and rubbed his nose briskly. "Ah-he! There's nothin' so likely to upset a man as bein' too sure. Son—" sobering and stirring in his chair—"logs are worth money to-day. Three hundred thousand of hardwood 's worth what I'd have called a *lot* of money. How'd that suit you, if I give you this three hunderd thousand for your start—so's you wouldn't have to grub along, so's you'd have it plumb easy compared to what I had?"

The secretary's head made a slight forward movement, as in surprise, but Luke's face betrayed nothing except a grim settling of the mouth; Rowe then looked at John and the boy thought a smirk crossed his lips.

"You can make out th' papers an' throw in that forty," said the old man. "You can do it to-morrow, can't you?"

"Yes, sir; the first thing in the morning."

Silence for a moment; Rowe walked away, and as he crossed the room inside, his head rocked backward as though, perhaps, he laughed to himself.

Young Taylor watched him go and then turned to his father. "Logs?" he asked, rather bewildered. "Why, I don't know saw-logs from——"

"From bumblebees!" Luke finished for him with anger in his voice—and a smile in his eyes. "But mebby your fortune's there, in them logs, boy. *I* 'd 'a' jumped at a gift like that— You've heard about logs all your life; likely you know more about logs than you do anything else— Well, there's your chance. Take it or leave it. 'Course, think it over; think it over. There ain't any rush so far as I can judge by th' way you put in your time. Now run along. I got all stirred up, talkin' about Michigan Pine. Think it over. *I* 'd say it was a handsome start——"

For a moment their gazes met, and apprehension ran through the younger man; for he did not like the sort of smile that clung in his father's eyes; did not like the forbidding set of the mouth.

"Very well, sir; I will think it over," he said, trying to cram his reply with dignity, and walked inside.

John stood before a mirror in the library, studying his own reflection. He did not like this; it struck at his conceit; it was distasteful. But there had been something else in his father's manner besides subtle derision—a challenge, perhaps. He sat down—to think it over.

He was so absorbed that he did not hear the motor-car come up the drive and stop at the side of the house. Philip Rowe was just leaving, light coat over his arm, when the headlights swung in from the street and blinded him. He stood on the step until the car stopped.

"Hello, Phil." It was a girl's voice, crisp and clear.

"Marcia?" He stepped forward and put out his hand.

"Is John here?" she asked and added, "I've an engagement with him."

The interval before Rowe replied was long enough to imply disappointment. "He's in the house now—the lucky cuss!"

"Flatterer! You and I've played a great deal this winter, Phil. To-night I——"

"You what?"

"Came for John——"

"And what else? What were you going to say?"

He moved nearer so he could see her face, dimly revealed by the dash-light. She drew back, showing her very white teeth.

"Nothing at all," she laughed softly, and when he gave a breath of only half-pretended dejection she whispered, "I came for John—*to-night!*"

Rowe looked quickly into the house, then made as if to open the car door, but the girl's hand flew out to hold the latch fast.

"Please, Phil!"

Their gazes held a moment, bright with insinuating lights. Then Rowe bowed.

"Very well," he said and entered the house to summon young Taylor.

WHEN John appeared Rowe was walking out the drive toward the street, very erect, with confidence in the sway of his shoulders. The girl had been watching him.

Taylor spoke in a low voice to Marcia Murray and smiled and slouched down beside her, showing an ease that was something more than familiarity with this one girl. There are men who can never be comfortable in the presence of any woman, who must always be self-conscious even before the mothers of their children; these are the men who are failures with women and who are secretly afraid and consciously inferior. At the other extreme are the men whose glances at women are always penetrating and never very curious; they have the assurance which makes for easy acquaintanceships which they take lightly;

they are at once fond and scornful of women, and know that the one does not live who can blind them to her weaknesses; they like to see this deception tried, simply to give them justification for bringing some presumptuous female to humiliation. The chief difference between these two types of men is that now and again the former is surprised by having a triumph forced on him; quite often the latter is bewildered by a defeat. John Taylor belonged to the second group.

The car swung out to the street. "Where away?" John asked.

She did not respond to his smile. "You are worried," she said.

"Not much."

"But some!"

"Yes."

"Want to talk?"

"More than anything else."

She turned along the car tracks, reached a small foot for the accelerator and they leaped ahead.

"Now talk to me," she said.

"I'd rather just look at you."

She lifted her chin. "An unfair advantage! My eyes are on the road."

"So's your mind. When we're somewhere else, I'll talk."

She dropped one hand from the wheel to pat his knee swiftly and flashed a smile at him. Then she kept busy with driving while Taylor took his unfair advantage.

MARCIA MURRAY was small and very trim. Her hair, even in the cold light of the arc under which they swept, was a glorious yellow. Luke had called her a wisp of goldenrod and John knew the old man had been half contemptuous; now his words came back to him and his throat contracted. She was just that: a stalk of goldenrod, fragile, slight, lovely. Her little features were sharp, eyes large and heavy-lashed. The silken legs stretching for clutch and brake were as gently molded as her fine hands on the wheel.

They left town and swept along the paved drive through scattered yellow pines where the moonlight bathed the girl and made John's heart leap—she was so like a cameo! He could conjure all manner of delightful things to say of her——

And then they slowed where the road swung to the right and she let the car roll from pavement to turf beneath great oaks that dripped moss, with the river again before them spattered by the superwhite moonlight.

The engine stopped and upon them burst the cries of millions of night bodies, a shrill, sustained chorus, a metallic trill. A wind rippled the stream and moonbeams flashed from it like rays from mirrors. A bunch of coots, sleeping on the water, showed black not fifty yards from them.

Marcia leaned forward and switched off the dash-light;. her slim, very cool hand found Taylor's.

"Now what?" she said gravely—and Taylor told what had taken place with his father; told it, mostly, looking straight into her eyes, which looked back at him wide and understanding and patient. But when he finished his narrative of what had happened and turned his brooding gaze out on the river, the girl's eyes narrowed ever so slightly and a look that was neither patience nor understanding showed there.

"My father's a queer old bird," he went on. "He's never understood me. He's never seemed to have much interest in me, especially since I went away to college; never stinted me in allowance and never crabbed because I didn't settle down, but there hasn't been much in common—except that we're father and son.

"I hadn't intended to put it up to him quite this way; but he forced my hand. He doesn't like the notion of any one getting anything without sweating for it, he doesn't like to have any one have opinions of his own— Logs are worth a lot of money, I know, but this isn't a marker to what I'd expected he would do for me. He knows, as well as I know, that it won't fill the bill and give me any sort of start. I've thought it over and the only answer I can find is that he wants to see what I'm wound on."

"And if you make good on this——"

"Then he must come across properly."

The girl put a hand suddenly to his shoulder and shook him. "Then you will, John! You have everything to gain and nothing to lose."

He nodded. "That's about the size of it. I don't want that sort of start; I've had my share of roughing it in the army; but it's only for a few weeks and it's a good gamble—if I make good."

"Of course you will," Marcia said.

Taylor turned toward her impulsively and put both arms about her small body. looking down into her moonlit face.

"Will you go with me, Marcia?" he asked.

She started and shrank. "Go with you? You mean——"

He nodded. "Marry me now. Let's start together— Let's begin as though this really were the beginning and we were going to make my fortune by the strength of my back— Marcia, will you?"

His voice was unsteady with eagerness, and he drew her closer, struggling to hold her face to the moonlight; but she ducked it out of his sight, buried it against his shoulder, and he felt a shudder travel her body.

"Marcia!"

"Don't, John!"

"Marcia, what is it?" He forced her chin upward and called her name again when he saw tears in her eyes. "What is it?"

SHE shook her head and pressed knuckles against her lips, looking away. "It's the same thing you tried to explain to your father," she whispered, voice husky, words rapid. "Don't you see that, John? Don't you see that to begin that way is asking something of me that you have tried to avoid yourself?" He murmured contritely as she went on: "I'm no more fitted to begin life as a poor man's wife than you are to—to work with your back! It isn't in me, dear. I feel small and mean and inferior. You've been so big and fine to me; I know you need me, but I'm thinking of the future. I don't want to mar our happiness by a bad beginning. I want to be with you, I'd give anything if I could marry you now and go into the woods with you.

"But what is a girl to do?" She held out a hand in query, which disengaged his close embrace. "I can't break away from the environment of my whole life, can I? After I've been schooled to tastes for beautiful things, after I've been taught to think that nothing is worth while which is ugly, I'm not wholly to blame if I find my ideas fixed, am I?"

"Don't Marcia! It's all such nonsense to be miserable over this."

"But I am! Don't you see that the two strongest impulses in my life are coming into conflict to-night? On one side is my love for you, on the other my unfitness to live a life that is cramped by the lack of money. I've been on the ragged edge of want ever since I can remember! Here I was, with girls for friends who knew no scrimping, no ugliness, being taught to devote my whole soul to things that they thought were worth while and, of course, attainable only by money. And I lived in a home— Why, John, you and I never would have been here to-night if we hadn't established the practise of renting the apartment winters. Papa takes a room and mama and I come here. We couldn't do it unless we leased the place we live in most of the year. We're here now because we had to rent until the middle of April this time! I have a car at the cost of a thousand little privations. I have clothes while my mother darns my father's underwear— Oh, it's been awful! But what could I do? I was not trained to work; I was not trained to undergo humiliation and hardships. I was——"

"And you won't have to!" he broke in savagely. "It was thoughtless to ask this of you to-night. I was carried away; that's all! I'll go out and do things for you, Marcia. I can pioneer as well as my father pioneered, for a little while. I'll show him that *I* can work as he worked if necessary. I'll make him regret what he said to me to-night and when I do that I'll bring comfort to you, sweetheart!

"You're right! Your training has been right! Money and what it will bring is *all* that matters. How you get it, even, doesn't count much any more unless you're a downright thief. It's dog-eat-dog and the weak man lose! I hate to grub. I hate to make a mean, slow beginning; but it's my father's way. He doesn't care about money, but he doesn't care about me particularly, either. If I can make him like me by taking up this offer—it won't be long, Marcia, it won't be long!"

She yielded to his embrace again and lifted her tear-wet face to his. One arm crept about his shoulders and lay there—like the caressing tendril of a flower—or the binding tendril of a creeper; and her eyes, on a distant star, narrowed again, though they were still wet, as she drew his face into the hollow of her soft throat.

"I feel like a rotter," he said. "I've

come up short against the collar, when I thought there was no limit to the leash. I've been doing you an injustice, been wasting our youth, when we should have every hour together. I've been keeping you in this damned uncomfortable situation you have at home while I dawdled. Now, I'm through!"

"I knew I could trust you," she breathed, and though the voice was very gentle and sweet it possessed a quality which indicated that she had arrived at that trust only after difficulties—and perhaps she was not yet sure.

It made the man start and repeat his promise, lips against her cheek, determination hot and not to be questioned.

Their hands met in a clasp of good will and Taylor again pressed his kisses upon her lips and throat and all the time her eyes were open, fixed on space, as though she listened for some word, waited for some thought—unshaken by his burst of passion.

They drove home slowly, John at the wheel, Marcia snuggled against him, her arm over his shoulder. Half-way in she said: "John, don't you sometimes think Phil Rowe is awfully close to your father? Almost dangerously close?"

"Dangerously?" he asked with an idle laugh. "I think Phil's honest enough."

"I don't mean that. Dangerous for you. He seems to have a better grasp on your father's affairs than any one."

"Oh, I see— Of course, father leaves all the detail to him, and Phil's a mighty competent chap for an underling."

"He doesn't strike one as an underling."

John chuckled. "He calls himself father's secretary, which, of course, he is. Father insists on calling him his bookkeeper."

Marcia's laugh was most perfunctory. "He's the sort of chap who would take a lot of ridicule and wait for the last laugh. He—seems so tenacious."

"That's the sort father needs."

"Perhaps." A pause. "When you are away he even answers your letters, doesn't he? He has told me that."

"Father never writes."

"But he spoke as though your father didn't even dictate them; as though he had even the responsibility of giving answers to his employer's son."

The motor speeded as John's foot unconsciously pressed the accelerator.

"He does have a good deal of authority——"

Two hours later John Taylor walked thoughtfully up the drive and let himself in at the carriage-door. His father and mother were sitting in the library, his mother reading the newspaper aloud to Luke. She took off her glasses when John came in.

After a moment Luke looked up and it struck the boy that his eye was cold; not at all as it looked when he talked to Philip Rowe.

"Father, I've decided to go north tomorrow," John said almost casually. "The sooner I'm on the job, the sooner I'll make my start. I want to thank you again."

His mother made a little flutter of pleasure; but Luke did not stir. He spat in the general direction of the fire and rolled a skeptical eye at his wife. "Son, when you get on the job, think about thanks."

There was something subtly derisive in his manner.

JOHN TAYLOR'S good intentions to become active at once lasted until he reached Detroit. There he dawdled a week with his friend Dick Mason and other pals, and it was not until one afternoon when he telephoned McLellan, his father's attorney, that he was stirred to action again.

"Mr. McLellan, this is John Taylor— Yes— Oh, several days— On my way to White's camp to look after logs that are there— Father gave them to me, and I thought——"

"*Gave* them to you!" came a rather startled voice. "What for?"

"A dowry!"

"You mean, you're going to try to do something with them?"

"Of course—" vaguely alarmed by the tone. "I thought perhaps you had some suggestions."

A pause. "By George, John, I haven't a suggestion to my back! You know the situation, of course."

"Why—yes—" hesitantly.

"All right. Help you if I can; good-by."

The situation? McLellan's voice had been rather dumfounded. *What* situation? And his father's warning to withhold his thanks until he saw the logs— Rowe's smile when Luke first proposed the gift——

He did not like it; there was something here which alarmed him.

There was to have been a party that night, with wine smuggled from Canada; but John did not wait. He prepared to leave in a mad rush, missed the last train by minutes, and on Dick Mason's advice bought a ticket for Pancake, clear across the county from the logs. He could drive in, however, and save a day.

And so on the morning of May fifth a sleepy Pullman porter put John off at Pancake, Michigan, in the gray mist of morning.

TAYLOR had seen such towns as this on trips to Windigo Lodge, Dick Mason's fishing-retreat on the Au Sable, hopeless little towns in the backwash of progress. It had a main street of sand, now black and rutted by spring rains, wooden sidewalks, false-fronted stores built of wood. There was the court-house pathetically struggling to set itself up with a measure of distinction with iron stamped to imitate red brick for sheeting and zinc cornices of extravagant design. There was the Commercial House with its sign nearly weathered away. The bank was of pressed brick and very tiny. The front windows of the office of the *Blueberry Banner* were broken and patched with yellowing newsprint. There was a livery-stable with a high-stepping wooden horse hung in front and beneath the enthusiastic equine a board painted with the word which deposed him from his once high estate: Garage.

Other thoroughfares branched from First Street and Taylor, and as he walked toward the hotel he could see the dwellings that fronted on them. Here and there was one which pretended to something, with a tower on one corner and gingerbread work dripping from the porches, but others were boxes only and needed paint, while numbers had never known garnishment of any sort. Beyond these the quality and number both frayed out until off toward the jack-pine, which grew thinly over the country, were the weather-beaten tar-paper houses of the Michigan pine barrens.

One other passenger had arrived with John, he noticed when half-way across the street. This was a big man, with a broad-brimmed hat and unbuttoned coat showing a heavy watch-chain and charm. His eyes were blue and sunny, his skin rough and red, mouth large. He emanated good-nature and when he said by way of greeting, "We should grab the worm this morning, neighbor," John grinned and remarked that they were early enough.

No one was astir on the street, though every chimney belched its portion of breakfast smoke. Within the office of the Commercial House a gaunt man, smoking a pale cigar, was putting wood in the base-burner as John and his companion entered.

"Hello, Jim," he said to the big man, coughing from his cigar smoke.

"Morning, Henry. Every little thing settin' pretty?"

"Sure is."

Henry rattled the stove-dampers while Jim dropped his bag and walked behind the desk. John noticed that this fixture was a portion of an old bar and that the floor before it was pitted with innumerable fine holes, the marks left by boots of rivermen, gone now, like the timber and the saloons.

Jim took a packet of letters from a shelf behind the desk and rummaged through them, sorting those that were for him. Then he retired to a chair by the stove and began opening envelopes.

The proprietor—the man with the cigar—went behind the desk, slapping his palms together to cleanse them.

"Did you wish accommodations?" he asked in a low voice, evidently desiring to leave Jim undisturbed with his mail.

"Breakfast, anyhow; probably that will be all." John signed the register. The other looked at his signature. "I'd like to get out to White's camp to-day. Maybe you can tell me who'll take me."

The man shook his head. "Ain't been up in th' hardwood all winter," he confessed, still in that half-tone. "When he gets through with his mail—" a nod toward Jim—"Mr. Harris can tell you. He knows."

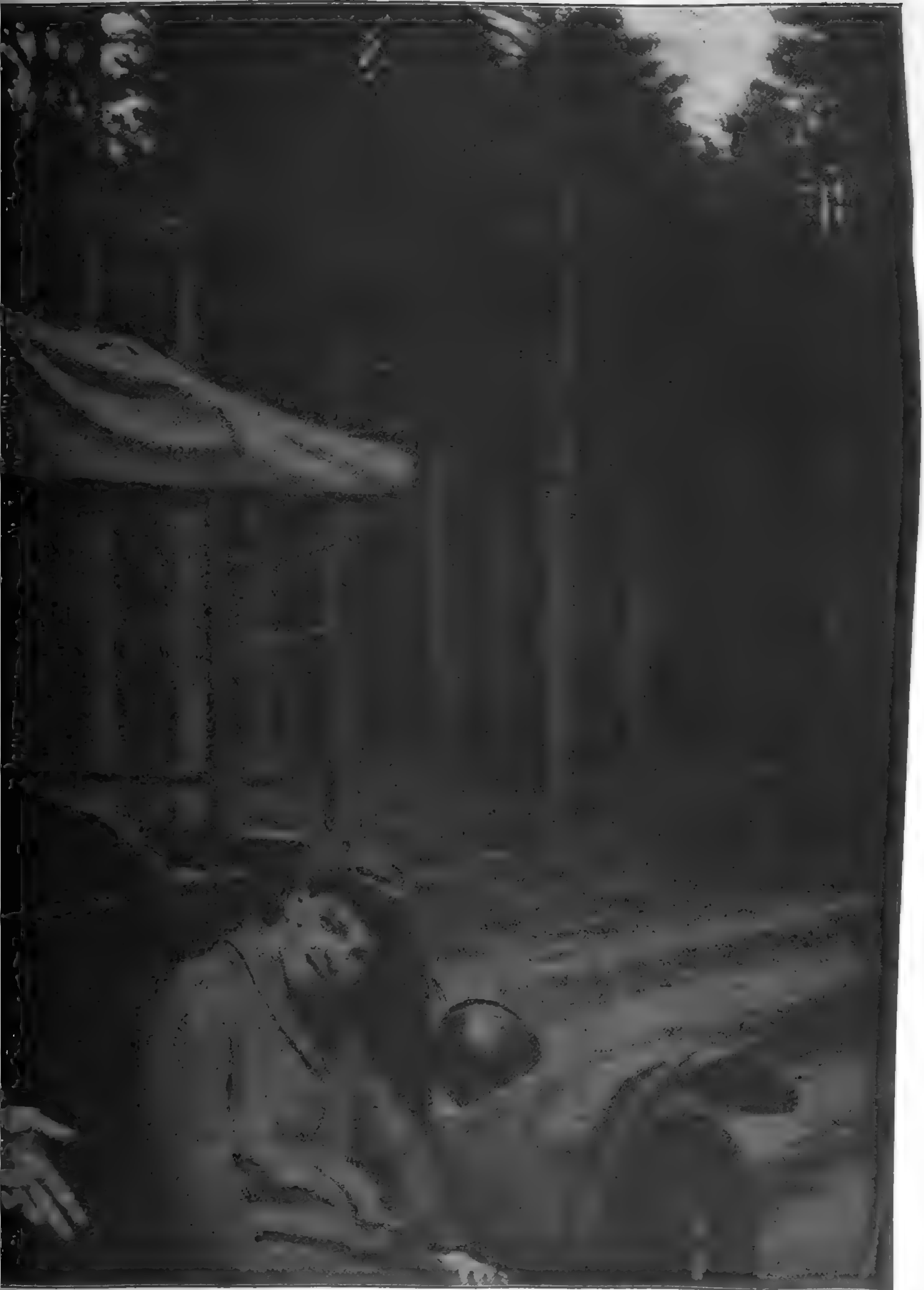
"What? What's that?" Harris looked up from his letters.

"This man wants to get to White's camp, Jim."

Harris removed his gold-rimmed eyeglasses and looked more closely at John. Behind the genial quality in that gaze was an appraisal, a strength that Taylor had not sensed earlier.

"Up in Lincoln township," he said, "away at th' other end of the county. The livery can take you up." He replaced

"I'm sorry I had to kick your dog," John said; "but the Providence that looks



ols and drunkards seems to have turned its back. He got in your dog's way."

his glasses and shook the fold from the letter he read. Then, "White's gone."

"Gone?" Startled.

"Yup. Camp's abandoned. Want to see him?"

John heard his own voice say: "No. I'm only interested in what he's been doing."

His heart sank. If White was gone, where were his logs and how was he to get them out? Or had there ever been logs? He wanted to blurt out questions, but he could not; this was his business, his first business; he had been so sure that it would all be simple. To ask questions would admit doubt; he would not do that to himself—let alone to strangers.

Harris went on with his mail. Henry puttered quietly. A door opened in a few minutes and a blowsy blonde appeared.

"Breakfast's ready," said Henry, and Taylor and Harris went into the dining-room.

They were the only guests and sat at the same table, and Harris, after glancing at the head-lines of a Detroit paper, put it aside. He winked at the girl when she put butter at his place, and she smiled with lumbering coyness.

"You got back for 'lection, I see," she observed.

"Yup."

"Seems like we can't do nothin' important without you any more, Mr. Harris."

"Hope you'll never do anything *rash* without me," he drawled in his big voice, and the girl giggled with a mixture of confusion and delight.

Breakfast came on. John had selected the best from the blowsy girl's chant, but Harris had half a grapefruit and, later, a palatable-looking steak; neither of these had been offered Taylor.

The two talked in desultory manner. Rain pattered the window and passed and the day brightened.

The proprietor came into the room. "The auto livery is open, Mr. Taylor," he said. "Shall I tell 'em you want to make a drive?"

"Thanks. Yes."

In a moment he looked up to find Harris's eyes on him with a genial smile.

"So you're young Taylor," he said and grinned.

"Taylor is my name and I'm young." John smiled; this man made one feel comfortable.

"You're Luke Taylor's boy?"

"I am."

"Well, well. Who'd thought it!"

"And how did you know it?"

"Why, you're a Taylor an' you're headed for White's camp to look after those logs, I suppose. Everybody here knows the trick that was turned on your daddy. Say, Taylor, that was a shame"—shaking his head. "I expect your daddy'll put the screws on White."

John said nothing; nothing of which he was conscious. He mumbled a few words and went back to his breakfast, not for nourishment but for refuge from his own confusion.

A trick, the man had said!

Harris talked on, a genial ambler in conversation, drifting from logs and lumber to an odd assortment of topics, and when they left the dining-room they smoked together in the office.

It was noon before Taylor got under way. Harris took him to the garage where a narrow-faced boy wielded a wrench over the motor of a decrepit Ford. On the street men greeted Harris as good inferiors address a genial master.

Yes, the boy said, he could make the trip when he had his motor working.

"If anybody can make her turn over, Lucius is the boy," said Jim.

Harris went his way. "Got to vote," he explained. "If you get over here again be sure and look me up, Taylor."

"WHO'S Harris?"

It was the first question John put to his driver as they rattled out of Pancake and took the ruts of the sand road that led straight north.

"Jim? Oh, he's lawyer for Chief Pontiac Power. You know about th' dam? No? Hell, they've got th' biggest dam in the world right here in this county."

"No!"

"Well, th' biggest in Michigan—or this part of it, anyway," the youth qualified. "Chief Pontiac Power an' Light put it in ten years ago. They shoot juice clear down to them big towns like Saginaw and Flint. Jim, he runs things. Fine feller, Jim, an' he sure makes the dough."

Lucius had further praises for Harris;

but John paid little attention. It was evident that unless he wanted continual loquaciousness in his ear it would be well to be chary with questions.

Beyond Pancake was nothing; literally nothing. No farms, no houses, no fences. The road was simply two deep ruts in the thin June grass sod and red-brown mass, and wound on interminably across the monotonous Michigan pine barrens or, as the natives call them, the plains.

HERE and there stood patches of jack-pine, at times many acres in extent. Again it was oak, with some sizable trees and much brush; in other places native poplar and balm of Gilead; birch and soft maple rose on ridges; in the distance was the blue-green of swamps. All about stood stumps, big stumps, close together, rotted by time and blackened by fire, ugly and desolate, but marking the places where within the generation mighty pine had reared their ragged plumes in dignified congregation. The same black that was on the stumps was on living trees, too; whole halves had been eaten from the butts of oak by creeping flames; smaller oaks, fire-killed, stood black and dead, while a clump of fresh brush rose from the living roots. Poplar and birch grew up through a tangle of punky, brittle trunks that had been trees not so long ago, that had given up life before fire and had finally fallen among their growing progeny.

From ridges Taylor could see miles of this. They dropped down into sweeping valleys of the same thing. Now and then would be a patch of country with nothing but grass among the stumps and that, in this early month, was dead and gray. There were no stones in the road, little gravel in sight, but here and there, where the sod was broken, yellow sand showed, streaked with black where the charcoal of countless ground fires had settled into the light soil. In places were lonely Norway pines, watchers over this devastation, and again the blackened corpses of mighty trees still reared themselves high, without limb or branch, straight and slim and tall, like great exclamation-points set there to emphasize the ruin that was where a forest had been.

"You from Detroit?" Lucius asked. John assented. "That's where I'm goin'. Nothin' here for a young feller; I'm practisin' up at th' garage so I can get a good job in Detroit. It gets darned awful lonesome, but I ain't got much longer to stay here."

"I don't suppose Pancake is very lively."

"Naw! Nobody but old folks an' little kids there. Why, I'm th' only young feller in town. All th' rest beat it; every mother's son-'f-a-gun. You see—" growing profound—"there ain't nothin' here to hold us. Up yonder's some hardwood lands, an' that's th' only soil worth a damn in th' county, an' who wants to farm when you can work in a factory? I like th' woods myself, but there ain't any camps any more, 'cause they've cut all th' stuff off.

"You bet your life I'm goin' to Detroit. I'd 'a' went last summer, but a fool warden pinched me an' I had to hang around. Jim Harris got me off, but it took a long time."

"Why did he arrest you?"

"Oh, I dropped a cigaret out here in summer an' started a fire that run over a little no-account brush—a thousand acres, he said—an' he held me under th' fire law. Damn fresh guy, he was, who don't know no more about these here plains than I do about diamon's. Started in arrestin' everybody that set a fire an' got everybody sore on him."

"No use stopping fires, is that it?"

"Hell, no! He claimed if you kep' 'em out, trees would grow, but we all know fire'll get in sooner or later an' that th' soil's so poor it won't grow nothin' nohow. There's some that says it'll grow timber again, but they're just plain ignorant." He laughed. "Why, there was a guy named Foraker who used to talk a lot about raisin' timber like a crop. Everybody knew he was wrong. He bought a big piece up ahead here, ten or twelve thousand acres, an' spent all he could get his hands on tryin' to grow pine; but it won't work. Everybody knows that. We called him Foolish Foraker an' called his land Foraker's Folly. He sunk a lot of money puttin' fire out an' growin' pine trees to plant."

"And they wouldn't grow?"

"They won't grow fast enough! It'd take a thousand years to grow trees like them stumps. Oh, they've got some scraggly little pine up here. Foraker's dead; but his daughter lives there. She had some swamp-land that kept her goin', but she's in debt an' would've been starved out by now if it wasn't for th' perfessers that come in here."

"Professors?"

"Yup." Lucius nodded and laughed. "They come up from th' college at Ann Arbor. Damn fools, all of 'em! Got a good eye for women, though!" He laughed again and turned an obscene leer on his passenger. "Oh, she gets along. Got to hand it to her. She's struck on herself an' won't mix with common folks. Good reason, too. She don't want to let anybody know what kind she is. Ha! Feller up here named Sim Burns—he's runnin' for supervisor in 'lection to-day—got stuck on her an' she wouldn't have him; so he tries to strong-arm her an' she run him off th' place with a wolf she's got. That kinda discouraged th' rest of th' boys, but we all know how she——"

He went on with his dirty gossip. They swung to the right into a wide valley and came upon the first indication of life and progress in a half-dozen miles. Wire fences paralleled the road, winter wheat made a vivid splash in the drabness, windmills rose from the flat lands, the country was dotted with buildings and in the foreground rose a huge red barn, on its hipped roof in great white letters the legend:

HEADQUARTERS
HARRIS DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

"Here are farms," said Taylor, thinking of what the boy had said about the land. Lucius nodded and smiled knowingly. "Is this the same Harris?"

"Yup. An' this is his graft."

"Graft?"

"Sure. He got this land for nothin' an' is sellin' it for somethin'."

THEY passed a tar-paper house with sagging window-frames and gaping doors; behind it stretched small fields which had been cleared of stumps but which were now grown up to sparse June grass. Fences were broken and some of the posts had been burned as they stood. A man was plowing half a mile away; in another direction a pile of freshly pulled stumps smoldered.

"Jim's a money-maker," Lucius volunteered. "You see, when Chief Pontiac got their dam-sites they had to take a lot of this here plains from th' lumber company, so Jim takes it from th' comp'ny an' sells it out to suckers."

"I see."

"Yup. He's a sellin' fool, too! They come in an' starve out an' quit an' it ain't long before he's sold th' place again.

"But over there—" pointing to the wheat, beside which grew young fruit trees and behind which black cattle grazed—"that looks good."

Again Lucius laughed in his superior manner and winked, as though he conferred a great favor by his familiarity.

"Sure. That's headquarters. That's what th' suckers see what can grow on light land. What they don't see is the train-loads of high-priced fertilizer Jim brings up, an' what they don't know is that he has a devil of a time to make a showin' in two or three fields even at that. If they ever get roads an' schools in here, his sucker business'll be better. An' you watch Jim! He'll get 'em!" He giggled.

The car rattled on. They passed a house close to the road where a man worked at a broken windmill.

"Sometimes a feller feels sorry for th' suckers, at that," admitted Lucius. He waved his hand and the man responded listlessly. "Take Thad Parker, there; he's had hard luck. He come from th' city to get rich on a farm. Jim soaked him right, he did; but Thad thought he knowed it all. Now he's most starved out an' his wife's sick. Still, you can't blame Jim. Money's all that counts."

Yes, thought Taylor, money is all that counts. He stirred uncomfortably on the uncomfortable seat, however.

They left the settlement and wound through the scrub-oak and pine.

"What in hell!"

The motor stopped with a jolt and a groan. Lucius crawled out and lifted the battered hood and peered at the motor. He scratched his head and sighed.

"Well, we got to do it over again," he said.

Taylor got out, too, annoyed by the delay. Lucius brought out tools; then quite cautiously, with a twinkle in his eye, he produced a bottle filled with a brown liquid.

"Have a little shot in th' arm?"

Taylor took the bottle and smelled it suspiciously. "What is it?"

"Little of my private stock. Good stuff. Go to it."

John declined, but Lucius drank deeply and smacked his lips. There was little John could do to help. His driver alleged that he knew the difficulty and could remedy it at once and began to dismantle the motor while John strolled about, climbed a near ridge and stood looking across that stretch of desolation.

IT WAS very quiet and lonely. A red-tailed hawk hunted in high, wide circles, coming from afar and going out of sight with no evidence that his vigilance had been rewarded. There were no birds, no small animals; wind made the only movement.

In his leather coat, high-laced officer's boots, smoking a cigaret in an amber holder, John Taylor looked much out of place as he stood on that ridge. He felt out of place, too. The dirty little town, the dreary people, the coarseness beneath Harris' geniality, the unavoidable gabble of the amiable Lucius, the mystery gathering about his errand all combined to depress and make him apprehensive——

"All grubbers!" he muttered. "Grubbers—with no chance—except Harris; and he has to live with them!"

He threw away his cigaret with a grimace and walked back to the car.

Lucius was not drunk; not yet. He claimed to have located the trouble, and Taylor watched so closely that he did not see the old man coming out of a side road until he was at his elbow.

"Hello, there, Charley Stump!" cried Lucius.

John looked up. A ragged ancient, with gray hair and watery eyes stood by him. He was resting on a bicycle, or at least a part of a bicycle. The handle-bars were bent and twisted; the frame was rust-flaked. In place of a saddle a wadded gunny sack was bound to the seat-post. There were no tires on the splintered rims, but quarter-inch rope had been wound around and around them.

"Hello, Lucius," quavered the man. "Broke down, eh? That's where a safety comes in handy," stroking the handle bars. "So long as you go, a safety goes."

"That bike won't go a hell of a ways."

"True. True, Lucius. When I get my tires, though, you watch me scorch!"

"You've been talkin' about tires ever since the winter of the blue snow."

"True. True, but wait until I sell some of my land or until I sue some of these here trespassers. Then I'll have tires for her."

Lucius said no more, being occupied with a refractory cotter pin. John looked again at the crazy figure, his torn Mackinaw, patched overalls and rubbers that were bound to his sockless feet by twine. About the face was a look that was nothing less than guilt. It was as though Taylor's casual inspection had charged the old man with some definite misdeed.

"You lookin' for land, mister?"

"No; no land."

"I got some good land, if you are. Fine land; I'll sell reasonable, too."

"Paul Bunion himself couldn't stir up a dust on your land, Charley."

"Is that so? That's all you know. You'll get too flip sometime an' somebody 'll give it to you in the neck."

With that retort Charley started on, pushing his safety, moving slowly.

"Batty in the knob," said Lucius. "Pushes that bike all over the plains, an' has for years. He's an old bully-boy an' went cuckoo when th' pine give out. That's what a young feller has to associate with here; that's one reason I'm goin' to Detroit.

"Le's have a drink."

John tried to protest, but Lucius showed temper and the attempt to dissuade him was not pressed. He drank and went on with his work.

Afternoon and the bottle were both nearly gone when the last bolt went into place and the motor responded to a turn of the crank. Taylor took the wheel despite the boy's remonstrance, and they went on.

"All righ' fer you," whined Lucius. "I know who you are; I'm glad White put one over— Lemme drive an' I won't be glad—'s 'tis, I am!"

So this backwoods moron, even, knew something about his affairs that John Taylor did not know, and for a moment his apprehension mingled with the chagrin of one left outside an open secret.

The car functioned as well as one of its age and condition of servitude could possibly do. They climbed the ridge and slid down the far side. Lucius drank again and leaned heavily against the other and insisted that their destination was not far.

A train paralleled their course and soon they came in sight of buildings; a smattering of tar-paper houses, with a small water-power mill on a dammed creek. A saw whined within and two Indians were loading pulp-wood bolts into a gondola on the siding. There were piles of thin lumber and banks of small logs.

"That's her mill," said the boy.

"Whose?"

"Helen Forakersh—her mill."

"Which way now? The road forks."

"Keep lef'—lef'——

They turned, crossed the head of the mill-pond and plunged into the gloom of thicker timber.

At first Taylor paid little attention; for there was the usual mixture of oak and poplar and small pines. The road was straight and even and had been plowed. The oak disappeared, the trees became larger; he craned his neck to look up and grunted in surprise. He was in a dense pine forest; silent and fresh and bearing no evidence of fire.

HE SLOWED the car and looked out curiously. They were small trees, averaging somewhere near a foot in diameter, he thought, but they were thick and uniform. The trunks were not smooth; many dead branches protruded there, nature's slow method of pruning. There was little brush on the ground.

"Is this Foraker's Folly?" he asked.

Lucius roused with a start. "Yup—Damn fool— *She's* a lu-lu, though!"

They crossed what appeared to be another road, also straight and plowed, but in it were no worn ruts. Soon they crossed another and another, placed at regular intervals.

And then they ran out of the gloom, into sight of the Blueberry River which swooped at them, imprisoned between high banks, and a house, first story of logs and the second thatched with shingles, wide-windowed, generous of chimney, which stood on a knoll against the deep green of white pine.

There were other buildings about, several of them, but the road led straight to the door of the big house.

"Here; we're in wrong," growled Taylor and set the brake, stopping at the corner of the building, not far from a dog-kennel, from the depths of which two orange lights glowed at him. He shook the boy roughly and roused him.

"Where are we?"

The other yawned.

"I'll be son-gun—brought you right to her housh!"

"Get out then, and let me out—I'll have to find the way for myself."

Lucius grumbled as John took him by the shoulder and shoved him to the ground. "Leggo me!"

"If I do you can't stand up. You're drunk and a fool."

"Who saysh I'm drun'? Drun', am I?"

With a lunging jerk of his body he tore free and staggered backward, swearing, and then from the kennel where two glowing spots had been came a gray streak, a ragged growl, a flash of bared teeth, white as frost.

Taylor leaped forward to grasp the boy; but again he twisted out of his reach. The dog left the ground in a long leap. John saw the red of its open mouth, caught the glitter of the eye, and his foot shot out, hard and true, toe landing sharply on the jaw, turning the creature up and over, flinging it hard on the ground on its back.

"Get out of the way!" he said and this time fastened his fingers in Lucius' sweater, jerking him toward the car, and stepped back himself as the dog came through the air—straight at his own throat—and reached the end of the chain and went back and down with a choking roar of dismay.

Taylor turned to confront Lucius, who had settled down on the running-board, hot words on his lips and anger in his face.

But he did not let the oath slip out; for a girl stood before him, a bareheaded girl in a red Mackinaw, red in her cheeks, a flash in her eyes.

"That was uncalled for," she said slowly.

There was no anger in her voice; that was steady and cool and of splendid quality; but there was anger in her eyes. Another thing was there: an impersonal superiority. She gave Taylor the impression of an individual of consequence being annoyed by something trivial.

She stepped forward.

"I'm sorry I had to kick your dog," John said; "but the Providence that looks after fools and drunkards seemed to have turned its back. He got in your dog's way."

She followed his gesture to the drooping Lucius and saw the silly leer in his eye. "I didn't understand. I only saw you step in to kick her. I'm sorry I was so abrupt."

But she was not sorry, Taylor felt. She did not care whether she had done him an injustice or not; she walked past him, speaking gently to the dog, calling her Pauguk. The animal, which had been running back and forth, muttering against her helplessness to be at the man who had struck her, sank belly to the earth when the girl approached, licking her chaps swiftly, now and then darting a venomous glance at Taylor. The girl's hand was extended, the red tongue caressed it furtively and Pauguk slunk close to her. John saw that this was no ordinary dog. Bigger, stronger, with something that dogs do not have, some curious thing which——

"Wolf!" he muttered.

"I'm sorry I come to your house and start such a disturbance at once," he said icily as the girl turned back. He scrutinized her closely and his gaze lingered on the thick hank of brown hair at her neck. Her eyes were brown, too, and wide and intelligent. "I got in here by mistake because my driver seems to have done pretty well at breaking the prohibition law."

She looked at Lucius again, but made no response; his explanation had not interested her.

"I was headed for White's camp," he went on, resenting this indifference. "He gave me the wrong turn."

When he spoke of his destination, her eyes came to his face and he fancied that a gleam of curiosity showed in them.

"You can't get there to-night," she said, holding out her hand to feel the first drops of rain. "The camp is abandoned, anyhow."

"I suppose I'd better go back to Pancake, then."

She eyed the car dubiously. "Between the machine and its driver I don't think that's wise."

"Where can I go? I never saw such a God-forsaken——"

"We can take care of you." Then turned and lifted her voice: "Joe? Black Joe?"

A squat and swarthy man appeared from behind the house. He looked at Taylor, at Lucius, and then at the girl with a surly grunt of query.

"Get him out of sight before the children see him," she said. "There's an empty bunk in the shanty?"

Black Joe spit on his hands.

"Let me help you," said Taylor.

The man, stooped over Lucius, looked at him closely and slowly from head to foot; he said nothing, but in the glance was contempt and hostility. He grasped the boy by one arm and an ankle, slung him over his shoulder and walked away.

"You'll have to come in here," the girl said, moving toward the steps. "The men's shanty is crowded, and anyhow you'll—probably be better off here."

She added that last after a look which covered him as thoroughly as had the contemptuous stare of Black Joe, and her manner was as though she took upon herself dutifully the protection of an unwelcome child. It was a challenge to his assurance with women and stung his pride.

"Thanks, but you needn't bother," he said sharply.

"No bother. It is the only place," as she ascended the steps and opened the door, turning to wait for him.

He was impelled to refuse curtly this strange hospitality and sought for some retort that would sting her as she had stung him. None came, but as he stood looking up at the girl while her eyes followed Black Joe and his inert burden into the near-by building he smiled rather grimly. He knew women. She chose to ignore him; he would let her go to the end of her rope and bring her up as shortly as the wolf-dog had brought up against her chain. He followed her into the house.

A LEAN, tall woman was sweeping the carpeted floor, a cloth tied over her head.

"Aunty May," said the girl, "this man is going to stay with us to-night. Will you show him the room?"

The woman also eyed Taylor sourly. The girl had drawn off her jacket and was approaching an old-fashioned walnut desk beneath a window.

"My name," he said coolly, "is Taylor. I think I know who you are."

She turned rather sharply and he saw interest at last in her face. He felt no regret that to impress her he had been forced to bludgeon through her indifference with his father's identity.

"You're here, then, to look after your father's logs."

"Yes." And the satisfaction he had derived from shaking her aloofness was engulfed in apprehension again.

"Well," said the older woman testily, "do you want to stand here an' gas, or put that satchel away?"

After the girl's manner this grumpiness was burlesque. Taylor grinned and followed her across the room to the open stairway.

TWO hours later Taylor stood alone before the hearth and looked about at that strange room.

The walls were lined with shelves and most of the shelves were heavy with books and pamphlets. The books were not the sort he had ever seen. There was little fiction and that tucked in high places; some history, some other usual books, but these were all lost in row after row of technical volumes on chemistry, soils, and whole shelves of texts of silviculture. There were many in French and German, all on forests and their products. The pamphlets came from every part of the country; from the Forest Service at Washington, from the offices of State Foresters, Tax Commissions and Congressional committees. There was a set of books from the Bureau of Corporations, a set from Pennsylvania, one from Canada. A file of the *Forestry Quarterly* was placed next a row of copies of the *Journal of Forestry* and below that was a set of technical forest papers from British India. A set of shelves was stacked with lumber-trade journals, the backs of many checked with blue marks, evidently indicating some important references.

Then there were circular sections of tree trunks which had been polished until the rings stood out sharply. Except for size they all looked alike to him and he did not pause for long before them.

The wall in which the fireplace was set was without shelves and on it were hung curious charts. There was one map of Blueberry County with an area set off in a broken blue line. That, he thought, must be the forest, Foraker's Folly. It comprised nearly half of one township. There were charts which he could not decipher; they looked like statistical reports in graphic form, but the legends were in symbols and they yielded him no information.

The flat-topped desk was in poor order, but the accumulated papers bore no dust, evidence that they were much handled. There was an old swivel chair at the desk with the leather worn from its cushion. The remainder of the furniture was largely old-fashioned and of long service. He looked about the wall again, scratching his chin in perplexity, and his eyes struck one other object which he had missed: a photograph in an oval frame. It was the face of a young man, and taken years ago. A flowing beard covered the expanse of shirt-front, a mop of dark hair was brushed back from the brow. That brow was wide and the eyes, though the reproduction was dulled by age, possessed the light of great intelligence. It was a good face, a sensitive face, the face of a kindly dreamer, and in it was something of the dignity which had been in the face of Helen Foraker as she talked with him outside the door.

He dropped into an armchair and stretched his feet toward the fire.

Rain slashed across the windows steadily and the rising wind moaned in the trees, dropping now to a disconsolate murmur, growing again to a sob, and this cry of weather in pine-tops struck a responsive cord of uneasiness in Taylor.

Events of the last two days had created a growing doubt in him; the uncongeniality of his surroundings was depressing, and as he sat there the thought of Marcia recurred to him, and for the first time his sense of obligation to her became conscious. She wanted the things that money could give; she trusted him to get them for her, and he was suddenly aware of the responsibility that devolves upon a man when he promises happiness to a woman.

He had been confident enough that this errand was but a brief preliminary step, that by it he would win his father's confidence and that the remainder would be simple. Now he was not so certain. Difficulties might be ahead and if he failed——

He rose and paced the bearskin rug.

Money and how to get it! The goal and the problem of his kind!

A door opened and Helen Foraker appeared. He stopped his pacing.

"We will eat now, Mr. Taylor."

He saw a table laid, with Aunty May and children standing by it. He saw, too, that when she bade him come to her board a portion of the indifference that had marked her was absorbed by a show of graciousness.

He entered the dining-room.

"Mr. Taylor, this is Bobby Kildare and his sister Bessy."

The little girl, who was no more than three, advanced and courtesied gravely. The boy, twice her age, face shining from recent soap, grinned self-consciously as he put out a warm hand. Aunty May did not look at John, but busied herself with Bessy's bib.

AT FIRST there was a constrained silence about the table. Aunty May poured tea and gestured reproof to Bobby, whose appetite was stronger than his sense of manners. Helen served and commented indifferently on the storm.

"I understand you're interested in conservation, Miss Foraker," Taylor said.

Her gaze flashed to him as though she expected to find ridicule in his face, held a moment and, not finding it, she smiled faintly.

"Most people who are doing what most other people call conservation work don't like the word. It suggests a holding-out, a setting-apart. Growing new forests is what my father called national life insurance. They are not to be held out of use forever, but to be used when ripe and ready for market."

She spoke quickly, with assurance and yet with abstraction, as one will who is accustomed to repeating a maxim for the unschooled.

"Your father was rather a pioneer in reforestration, I take it."

She nodded. "A pioneer in this country, at least. This is the first fairly big hand-grown forest in the country."

"It surprised me. I had no idea it was so far along."

"Most people who stop in Pancake have little idea of what is here."

"I understand that. I heard about your pine on the way out."

"With embellishments, I presume?"

"Plenty," he laughed.

Silence. Helen spoke to the other woman and to the children, but displayed no inclination to talk further with Taylor, which nettled him. He cast about for another conversational entry and finding none urged:

"I'm interested. Where did your father get his idea? How long ago did he make his beginning?

"Aunty May, give Bessy some more potato, will you? The idea came to him as all big ideas come to big men, I suppose—" turning to John—"out of an appreciation of coming necessity. He had made some money in pine. He came on this tract a year or so after the last of the original pine was cut. It was naturally protected from the fires that always followed logging by the river, swamps, hardwood and a chain of lakes, and no fire of consequence had been in here. He saw the seedlings coming up so thickly, knew that the land had produced splendid pine once and believed it would again. He bought the piece, kept fire out, went abroad to see how central Europe had grown its own forests, and put in the rest of his life making this land produce its second crop.

"That was in the middle seventies when he started. The growth is nearly fifty years old now. Foraker's Folly has become an old story and a stale joke to the locality, and very few people outside are interested enough to find out about it."

A burst of wind set the forest moaning about them with a mighty organ note and it seemed as if the pine had commented in gruff approval on the story which she had told with such swift strokes.

"Your father had a great deal of courage," Taylor began, and the girl looked up with something like appreciation. That died, however, when he added, "But that's a long time to wait for a return on your investment."

"Yes," she said, and in the response was marked coolness.

The outer door opened and Helen looked over her shoulder. "What is it, Joe?"

The short man crossed the room and stood in the doorway, wet cap in his hands. "Tell her," he said, "that Milt couldn't get any bacon from Raymer."

The girl turned to Aunty May and said gravely: "Milt couldn't get bacon at the mill, Aunty."

The gaunt woman grunted and her eyes

flashed. "Tell him," she said, "that the baby-trap needs a new stake an' I want it in by morning. I can't chase younguns all day long."

"Joe, the baby-trap needs a new stake. Will you get it in to-morrow?" Helen asked.

"First thing," promised Joe. He waited a moment, then turned and went out.

Taylor looked at Helen and stole a swift glance at Aunty May. Nothing in their faces gave a key to this strange procedure. He stirred in his chair and smiled and then attempted again to start talk. He could not break the girl's reserve, however; he extended himself in the effort; she was coolly courteous, but that was all. He could not make her respond and with his repeated failures his impulse to rouse her interest grew strong. He had the evening before him, he told himself; he would take her measure before he slept!

BUT there was no opportunity for that. When they left the table, Taylor lighted a cigaret and stood before the fire while the girl went to the telephone and for twenty minutes her talk was a jumble of queries, orders, comments which meant little to him: an inventory of lath was mentioned, the billing of cars of pulp-wood, reference to a new band-saw, memoranda hastily made, talk of a sick horse and regret that the man, Milt, must spend the night with the animal.

She hung up the receiver finally. She did not even look at Taylor, but sat at the desk and lighted a student-lamp which stood there.

"I hope you won't think we're inhospitable," she said, as though it did not matter greatly what he thought; "but this is a busy time of year."

He felt himself flushing. This was dismissal with no opening for argument—and after he had planned to make this girl come to time. He found himself walking toward the stairway, muttering about letters he wanted to write, feeling driven out and inferior and furious. He watched the girl as he ascended. She was sorting papers rapidly and did not even glance at him, John Taylor, who knew all about women and who had dedicated this evening to making her regret that she had patronized him and been indifferent.

An hour passed.

John sat at the table in his room, paper before him, pen idle in his hand. The room was heated by a grating in the floor which gave into the room below where the girl sat and from time to time the creak of her chair or the rustle of papers came up to him. Beyond those sounds and the talk of the pines outside there was no break in his solitude.

Then a car came, stopping in front of the house, and a rap sounded on the door. Helen Foraker rose to open it. A tall man with a thin, red nose, a stoop, a celluloid collar and small greedy eyes stood on the step, a package under one arm.

"What do you want, Sim Burns?" she asked, but did not move to bid him enter.

"Evenin'," and his eyes shifted to the interior, swinging back to her face when he saw that the room was empty. "I want to talk to you."

She did not reply at once, her eyes in shadow held on his; she saw the bronze of his face deepen, but he did not go on with his errand; not even when she said impatiently, "Yes?"

"It's nothin' I can say in a minute. I'd rather come in."

She stepped back and let him enter, closing the door behind her and watching the man as he unbuttoned his overcoat and shook the water from it.

"You don't need to stand by the door, Miss Foraker. I ain't goin' to hurt you."

"I'm sure of that. Sit down."

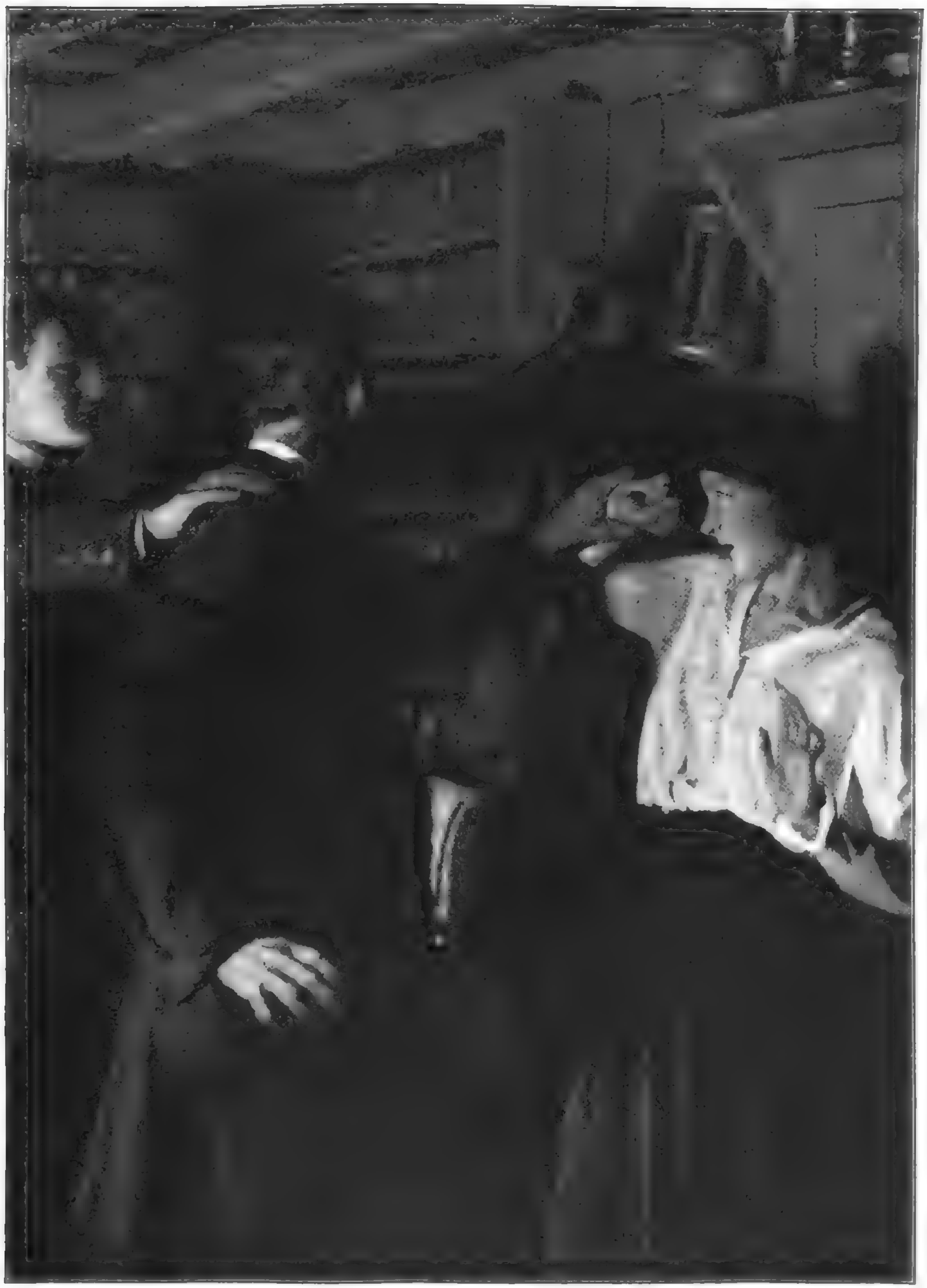
"Th' last time I was here you didn't ask me to sit down."

"You remember very well."

"Yeah. If you thought I was goin' to forget, you was fooled. Remember? I'll say I do!" He laughed shortly and licked his lips; his glittering eyes were steady on her face and most unpleasant. "That's why I'm here to-night, because I remember an' want you to remember. I told you that day I wouldn't forget, that you'd see th' time when you'd wish you'd gone a little slower."

A flush whipped across the girl's face, but she did not speak; only settled her lips in a tighter line and watched him expectantly.

"I give you all the show there was," he went on bitterly. "I come here like an honest man would; I offered you a good home



"Miss Foraker has asked you to let go her arm. You will do it now." There was a snap to the last and John dropped a firm hand on Burns's shoulder.

a house an' a respected name, an' when an' you wouldn't have any of me you wasn't satisfied to turn me down but had to set your damned dog on me an' spread th' story to th' county."

He swallowed vehemently.

"You may recall," she said evenly, "that it was necessary to turn Pauguk on you to avoid—ugly things."

"Yeah. That's what you think. I wouldn't touched you, wouldn't hurt a hair of your head. Didn't I come here to ask you to marry me?"

"I gathered that. You were drunk."

He fidgeted a moment before her scorn, then burst out: "That ain't what I come for, to go over all that again. I just wanted to remind you that I said then you'd live to regret it. Well, you have."

He hitched the package under his arm closer against his side and tapped it.

"That's th' poll-books of Lincoln Township. I'm takin' 'em to Pancake to-night so they can canvass th' vote in to-day's election. Know what they'll find? They'll find that Sim Burns is supervisor."

"I expected so. You were unopposed."

"Unopposed! An' I'd've won anyhow; I'd've won if it was th' last thing I ever done, because ever since that time when th' story about you an' your dog an' me got around I've lived just to pay you back." His voice mounted as he moved closer to her, head on one side, arm extended in an accusing point. "By bein' supervisor I'm tax officer of this town; by bein' tax officer I hold you an' your forest in my power! Like that! Now, do you understand?" He opened his long, bony fingers to their limit and closed them slowly as if they strangled a hated life.

One of Helen Foraker's hands, which had hung limp at her side, moved ever so slightly. Some of the color went from her face and in place of her scorn appeared a flicker of misgiving.

BURNS remained tense a moment, then relaxed suddenly and laughed again. "I guess you get me," he nodded slowly. "You seen fit to run me off your place. Now I'll see fit to tax you out of th' county! There's only one reason your old man an' you got by this far. Your father was laughin'-stock for th' old county officers. They'd told him so often that he was a fool and couldn't grow pine that they got to believing it. They rode him so hard that they couldn't believe any other way an' save their faces. So naturally they couldn't run up his taxes, 'cause if they did they'd admit that they was wrong, an' men don't like to do that—'specially after they've made so much noise about bein' right.

"None of 'em was any more down on you than Tom Burns, my own uncle. None of 'em ridiculed any harder than he did. He'd been supervisor from Lincoln Township since I can remember. Now he's dead an' I'm in his place, an' I ain't afraid to step out an' tell th' world an' Blueberry County that these old men have been wrong; that you *can* grow timber, that you have grown timber, an' that now, by God, you're goin' to pay for the privilege of growin' it in this county!"

His voice had risen to a thin cry and his eyes blazed churlish triumph.

"Yes, it is likely you can do that, if you want to," she said, measuring each word, thinking desperately. "It has been done before. The last stick of hardwood in the county was taken off last winter because you men taxed its owner to the point of financial failure. All over the country logging-camps are slaughtering timber to keep ahead of taxation. You may start that with me if you see fit; you may not get very far, but——"

"Oh, I know Humphrey Bryant's behind you! I know he's tryin' to turn the timber taxation upside down at Lansing. Let me tell you, girl, I'll snap my fingers in Hump' Bryant's face. He's got to get elected to th' senate again before he can help you an' he ain't so much a fox as he thinks he is. I'll have your assessment on th' rolls in a week; I'll have you whipped before th' first of the year because you drove me off, with your wolf bitch!"

He forced the last words through set teeth. The girl, backed against the door, breathed rapidly as he advanced.

"Unless you'll listen to reason," his voice lowered to a whine, "unless you'll make a new start with me. Unless——"

"Sim Burns, you——"

"Forget it!" His hand whipped out to grasp her wrist as anger leaped into her eyes. She struggled against his clutch.

"Let go!"

"Let go, hell! Choose now! It's one or

the other: me an' your forest—or neither!"

He had not heard the step on the stair. He was so centered on his strategy that he did not detect her relief and neglect to struggle.

"I think this will do."

It was John Taylor's voice, close behind Burns, and the man looked over his shoulder sharply, hand still clutching Helen's wrist. For a second his amazed eyes clung to Taylor's confident smile and he made no move.

"Miss Foraker has asked you to let go her arm. You will do it now."

There was a snap to the last and John dropped a firm hand on Burns's shoulder.

Sim whirled to face him. "What's this to you?" he panted, rage returning to cover his start.

"Not much, except that you are going to go away now—unless Miss Foraker wants to say more to you."

He looked at the girl, who moved away from the door slowly, as though not just certain of the strength of her limbs. She did not look at the men, but shook her head in a disgusted reply to Taylor's words.

Burns straightened and put on his hat, buttoning his overcoat haughtily. "Don't think you're drivin' me out," he sneered. "I've said what I had to say 'nd am ready to go."

"Which is fortunate for you, but not so fortunate for me. I'd welcome a chance to throw you out!"

John's voice trembled on that as a burst of dislike ran through him. He opened the door and with a quick gesture indicated the way out.

"Don't be in such a rush, young feller, I ain't quite——"

He had paused to fasten the last button of his coat, but John grasped his arm and with a yank impelled him to the threshold. Sim struggled and stopped and half turned to protest, but the door swung swiftly shut and he stepped into the rain to avoid being struck by it.

Taylor stood by the door until the car moved away. Helen had gone to her desk, seating herself weakly, supporting her head on one hand. He could see her profile, softened by the yellow glow of the lamp. She was very lovely, this beauty in distress, and he let the pride of being her defender come to full life. His chagrin at her repulses was even stronger now, for he felt that he held the upper hand. He had no genuine concern for her, no sympathy for her fright and depression. No longer would she patronize him! She would eat out of his hand now!

He moved to the desk and stood looking down at her. Helen lifted her face and met the amusement in his eyes.

"I thank you," she said. "It is lucky for me you were here."

He laughed deprecatingly and settled his weight to the corner of her desk, swinging the one leg, big hands clasped on his thigh.

"And it is lucky for me," he said, "that I was here. Helping you gave me a real thrill."

His voice was low and gentle; too low, too gentle; he leaned forward toward her and smiled and one of his hands dropped to the blotter, very close to hers, resting there lightly, as though it would move forward and cover that other hand. His smile, his tone, his manner indicated that he felt himself completely the master, and was very certain that his advance would not be repulsed this time.

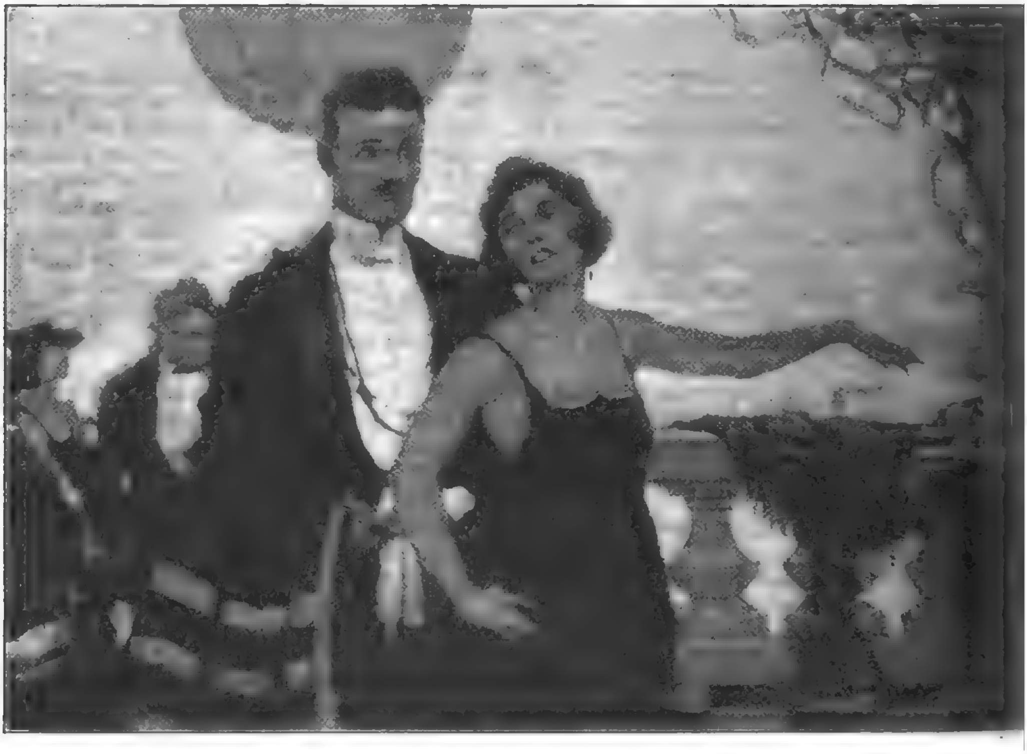
The fright went from Helen Foraker's eyes. They studied his face a moment, almost abstractedly, looked down at his hand and went back to meet his gaze.

"Please don't," she said abruptly. "There is no one here to throw you out, Mr. Taylor. Besides, I didn't think you were quite that sort."

He straightened, flushing, feeling cut and whipped, like an impudent little boy who has met dignified rebuke. He had no retort, had no resources with which to bolster his poise. He tried to smile, but the effort died. He cleared his throat to speak—he knew not what.

Then felt welcome relief as the telephone-bell whirred and the girl rose to answer it.

What was the mystery concerning John's logs? "Foraker's Folly" will be continued in the December number, out November 15



She shook her hand free and rose quickly, her cheeks colorless. "Take me home, Bob. It's the
He pushed back his chair and got to his feet.

The Dancing Feet

What a Girl Lost When She
the Pathetic Complication That
ization of Life's Realities—

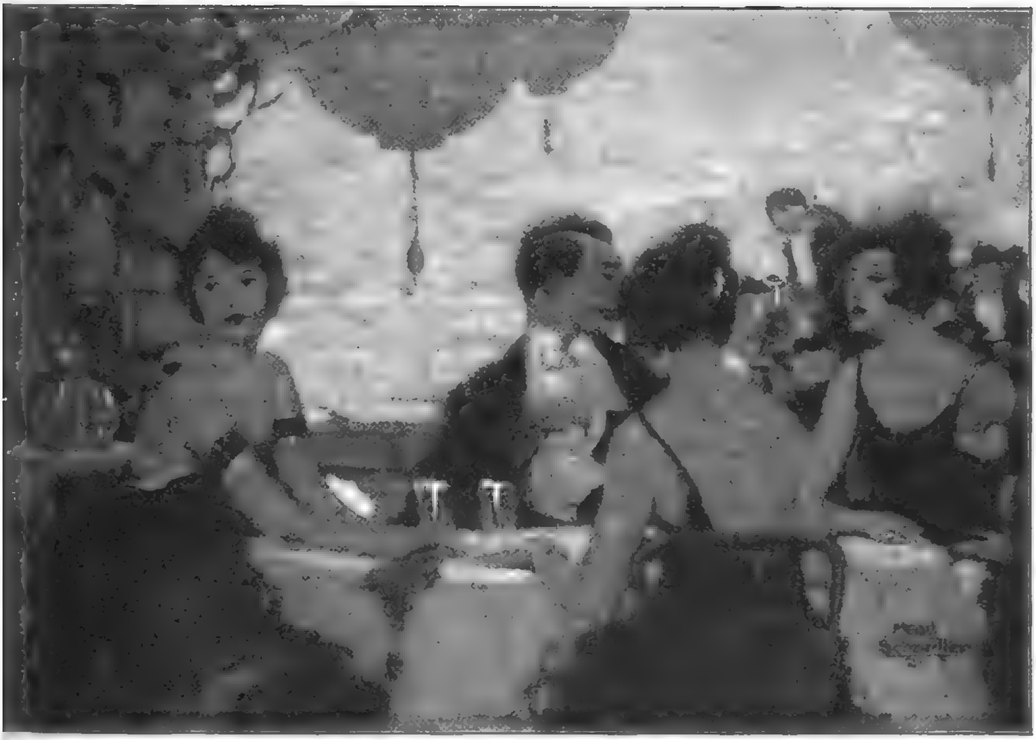
Illustrations by

WHEN Doctor Ian Mackay pronounced Janet Channing's death the result of heart-failure he spoke only a half-truth, but no one recognized the fact, or resented it at least, except Janet's seventeen-year-old daughter, Radiance.

By the time the golden California poppies which the girl had planted on the new grave in the little country cemetery sent up the first shoots of green, life in the dull, lonely house turned again on greased cogs.

Matthew Channing was perhaps sterner, more deeply engrossed with his putterings in the laboratory; his maiden sister, Lizzie, was a trifle more important and domineering now that Janet's lightly held responsibilities had fallen on her capable shoulders; Sarah, the married daughter, came oftener, pervading the place with her sadly dutiful solicitude; Mary, the housekeeper, was more silently unobtrusive. But all four had accepted the inevitable with pious submission. In Lizzie's phrase, "they could be thankful that Janet had passed away so peacefully."

Peacefully! The bruised spirit of Janet's "little girl" writhed under the mockery. Her passionate love for the dead woman was crucified daily by the family's placid acquiescence in fate's decree. Then in one burst she blazed forth her anger and grief and rebellion; not at her father, whom she regarded with a look not good to see in any daughter's eyes, but at the little doctor.



heat and this heavy odor of flowers. I keep smelling apple-blossoms. They—they make me ill."
all that veneer of boyish pleasantry blotted out.

By Anna Blake Mezquida

*Went Away to Win Fame and Brought Her Back to a Real-
A Story With a Heart-Throb*

Mead Schaeffer

All through the tedious, perfectly ordered dinner, moving like clockwork under Lizzie Channing's efficient direction, the storm had been gathering in the girl's soul, and with smoldering resentment she greeted the doctor's cheerful entrance as dessert was being carried out. Almost at once began that scientific fire and backfire between him and her father, a conversational debauch in which the two men delighted and into which they plunged gleefully. At such times the hovering ghost of the woman who was gone seemed shut out most completely. And after listening in brooding silence for a time, the girl stumbled to her feet and fled to the garden.

A friendly arm caught her beneath an apple-tree.

"Hel-lo!" exclaimed the fresh, pleasant voice of young Edward Mackay, the doctor's son. "I came to call, but if witches and demons are after you, Ray——"

"Oh, witches! Your father and mine are at their darned science again."

Edward Mackay's laughing eyes sobered. "Science is wonderful! The most wonderful thing in the world, I think. It has kept coming to me all this last year in college." His quick, eager smile flashed again. "I've got my medical degree, Ray. I'm a full-fledged M. D. now."

The cloud lifted momentarily from her face. "I'm so glad, Ed. You'll be racing off to San Francisco, I suppose, to make a name for yourself?"

"Not I! I'm going to help good old dad right here in the Pajaro Valley. These have been hard years for him, Ray. When he met me at the station last night, I was shocked to see how he had broken."

"You won't find father broken." There was a queer dead tone in her low voice.

Edward Mackay did not notice. He was holding her from him, drinking in her dark, gipsy-like loveliness, a dawning something in his steady blue eyes that caused her heart to flutter oddly.

"You're sweet—sweet as the apple-blossoms," he breathed huskily.

She shook herself free, upset and confused, her tempestuous mood at outs with this strange new seriousness that had replaced the old easy camaraderie.

"I don't want any man to make love to me!" she flared. Then added, hardly understanding herself: "Please go. I want to be alone."

SHE stood where he left her, her fingers nervously crushing a pinkish-white spray that drooped from above. Even the friendly flowers and fragrant apple-trees failed for once to bring her peace. To-night she hated the garden as part and symbol of the tragedy that had tied her mother to this drowsy inland town away from the great metropolis that she loved.

What had the madcap Janet—a mere child of sixteen—seen in the staid teacher of chemistry in the little Watsonville High School? Even in his youth, Radiance could not picture Matthew Channing as anything but stern and reserved; brilliant perhaps, fascinating even, when talking upon a subject he loved, but a skeleton at the feast of joy in his own home.

As a little girl, romping in the garden, Radiance had watched her lovely mother drooping at the picket fence, staring across the orchard in the long, uneasy silences that were associated even then in her childish mind with the quiet, cold man whom she called father.

The picture haunted her torturingly. And as old Doctor Mackay came slowly down the steps she flashed out at him like a wild creature.

"Heart-failure!" she scoffed, as though the precise cause of her mother's death had just been made known to her. "Mother's heart didn't fail, Doctor Mackay. It broke!"

The brusk-spoken, quick-tempered, tender-hearted little Scotchman, who for twenty years had been more than physician to the Channings as life beat its lusty way into their midst or slipped past his restraining hands, gave the girl a shrewd, keen glance.

"Tut! Tut!" he said crossly. "Life leaves its scars on us all. No woman who marries and brings up a family comes through the strain with a heart quite whole."

The girl tossed her head. "It wasn't *that!* It was father. He crushed the joy of living out of her. He did it deliberately."

"You've been reading silly novels, Ray. Your father is a good man. He was a good husband."

She turned on him furiously. "Even *you* won't understand!"

He drew her arm through his. "Let's walk up and down a bit. Tell me about your mother. Perhaps we can straighten things out."

"You never really knew mother, Doctor Mackay—she was always so subdued before father. But away from him she bubbled with life and fun. You should have seen her when she and I were alone—dancing and carrying on! It was better than a circus. And she adored everything bright and gay. That's why she called me 'Radiance.' Father said it was an idiotic name. He was always crushing the happiness out of her."

"Come! Come! Your father knows how to laugh."

"With you, perhaps! He expected *her* to be interested in all his messy mixtures and horrid little test-tubes," she defied. "Even when he had his own laboratory and began to grow famous, he wouldn't move to the city. He said he could work better in the quiet of the country. He never thought of *her*. He never tried to care for the things *she* liked. He never let her have a good time in her own way. And now—she's dead."

The doctor's expression was not unkindly, though his voice was curt. "She had her children. They must have brought her happiness."

"Edgar was sickly and Sarah was so solemn. Mother couldn't play with them."

"Did she have to play?"

Radiance frowned impatiently. "She couldn't live like a mummy always. I'm just like her. My feet dance when they ought to walk."

"We all can't dance through life, my dear."

"*I* shall! He sha'n't break me the way he broke her."

A sudden fire lit the doctor's faded eyes. "Your father is a great scientist, a man whose discoveries have meant big things for humanity. His days are too full for frolic. Such men take joy quietly—as they do sorrow." He paused, as though wishing to say more; but the seal of confessional binds the physician's lips as well as the priest's.

"There is tenderness in your father's heart, Ray," he finished lamely. "Try to bring it out."

"She tried!" The girl's voice was heavy with grief. "Before she died she said, 'Ray, if joy comes your way, take it! Don't let them rob you.' "

The doctor caught his breath sharply. "Rob you? No one can do that but yourself! Child, you don't know the meaning of life. You won't always be dependent on your father. I had hoped some day—My boy is only a country doctor, Ray. And like his dad he'll probably be poor and hard-working and have little time for fun. But he's strong and clean and fine, and from a lad he has fought your battles, little girl. Remember—" his voice broke and he laid a hand on hers—"it's not always the dancing feet that find the road to happiness."

BUT Radiance had not remembered.

For six years—six hard, struggling years in the great city—she had made a business of forgetting.

Six years! Sometimes it seemed ages, sometimes but a day back to the night of her final break. It was her eighteenth birthday, and the young folks of Watsonville were giving a dance in her honor. Edward Mackay had called to escort her, and she had flown down the stairs to him on feet that scarcely touched the ground, excitement throbbing in her cheeks and beating beneath the low-cut bosom of the frivolous little gown she had secretly fashioned for the evening. And her father had stood blocking the doorway, stern and disapproving, and declared that she could not go.

It was a consuming sense of injustice rather than anger that made her say quietly: "You've ruled me for the last time, father. By the laws of California I'm my own mistress from to-day, and I'm going to the city to work and—to live."

Her very soul was seared by his white-hot wrath, his prediction of calamity, his cutting refusal to have more to do with her.

"You have chosen to go your way," he blazed, "and nobody on God's earth can stop you." The slam of the library door told her he had shut her from his heart and house forever.

She turned for sympathy to Edward Mackay—always her champion and defender. But she encountered a severe young judge. Perhaps, if he had been humble and imploring— But he crushed her in his arms and told her he would not let her go; she would have to put up with things as they were until he got his start and could take care of her.

She retorted flippantly: "What! In this graveyard?"

It drew from him the choked, angry plea: "Is having a good time all you care about? You know you can't go far on the little money your mother left you."

She had flared back with foolish, cruel, irrevocable things. And they had parted.

Ugly memories!

They had hurt, sometimes—when she was lonely, or when little intimate pictures of her childhood with Edward Mackay flashed before her. But oftener they had stung her to a proud defiance, had enabled her to carry her head high through those wearisome months at jobs for which she was not fitted; through those futile months of doing nothing; through that lean year as an artist's model. It was one of her few triumphs that her skilful posing had helped the struggling young Spanish painter Pedro Duran to sudden recognition; but his success had come too late to help her. By that time she had abandoned the model's platform for the cabaret.

She realized now that it was strange she had not earlier thought of becoming a dancer. But dancing was only her metaphor for joy. It was Duran who told her she had the gift. Her flying feet could depict a slave's lament, the song of Pan, the rush of winds. What long hours she had practised before the mirror of her tiny room, weaving fantasies out of everything and nothing! But it had paid. A manager of a smart cabaret had taken her on. And here Calderón had discovered her.

In the heart of the hotel, theater, shopping district, where numberless eating places catered to San Francisco's jaded palates, "Calderón's" acted as fitting climax to the wealth, the ostentation and beauty that swished and sparkled and frothed through Market Street and lower Powell.

Radiance had danced at Calderón's a month when the little Spaniard evolved his most taking idea: A Fantasy of All Nations. One week the place was dully sweet with attar of roses; velvety rugs covered specially constructed divans; oriental lamps glowed softly; the menu was Turkish, modified to popular taste; the dancers were voluptuous beauties straight from the "Arabian Nights." The next week Calderón's was Russia, samovars and all. After that came merrie England, substantially roast beef and plum pudding. And so on. This week it was India. It was the harmony that fascinated: decorations, food, music, dancers.

Of the many performers who sang or glided or contorted for Calderón's patrons, Radiance alone took part in the dance of every nation. Her grace, her dark beauty, her versatile genius, lent themselves readily to each setting, and seeing the furor she created the first night, Calderón had starred her. She went under her own name Gallicised by an accent into Radiánce.

SIX years it had taken her to reach this point—six hard, bitter years! It was irony that to-night she could not rejoice; that to-night her thoughts must go running back to that moonlit scene in the garden; to Edward Mackay laughingly holding her there beneath the apple-tree; to the old Scottish doctor with his gravely kind warning—to-night, when every flash of her slippered feet meant money and popularity and the admiration of a man like Fernald!

It was that sprig of pinkish almond-blossoms which some one had brought in from the café and laid upon her dressing-table! She stood there, waiting her turn, ringed, necklaced, bangled, crushing the spray between her fingers as she had crushed those other blossoms that other night.

At the stroke of midnight the three dusky-skinned, turbaned youths who had been cavorting, lithe as fauns, whirled themselves into the background, and Radiance sprang into the circle of amber light, her body swaying to the crash of barbaric music. Hers was the elfish grace of the wood-nymph, a virginal purity of motion peculiarly foreign to Calderón's. It set her apart from the other dancers, and perhaps accounted somewhat for her attraction.

Bob Fernald's gaze followed her with burning tensity. He was always at this particular table, although usually he shared it with his friends, a fashionable, hilarious crowd, gay with the daring of irreproachable respectability. He was instinctively a man of crowds, jolly, easy-mannered, clever of tongue, a good fellow rather than a roué; and if his well-manicured hands were growing a little red and puffy from high living, they dipped into his bulging wallet with a generosity that won obsequious attention from servants and match-making mamas. In accepting Fernald's friendship, Radiance knew that she had brought upon herself the enmity of more than one society bud, who hated her the more jealously because Fernald had succeeded where other men had failed.

The fact was, she held few illusions regarding most men who seek acquaintance with café entertainers; but Fernald was different. Their meeting had come about through his kindness to a child dancer at Calderón's, a homeless little waif whom Radiance had befriended; and as it took place in the presence of Fernald's sister, Radiance saw no reason for holding aloof.

He had devoted himself to her openly, frankly, after that. She knew that she piqued him, lured him, brought to his bored existence a spice he had not found in the rather obvious young women of his set. But if there was egoism in his friendship, he yet gave more than he asked. When she was not dancing, he swept her off for dinners, theatre parties, rides, and twice she was his guest at gay Bohemian affairs at the Fernald home in Burlingame. After her starved girlhood she was intoxicated by this taste of living, humbly grateful to the man who had thus flattered her.

Always, lately, as she danced, it was with a feverish eagerness to please Fernald; and she tried to keep her thoughts on him now. She wanted to beat back that cloying fragrance of almond-blossoms, and stem that haunting tide of memory.

A LOUDER blare of music and she made her exit, swift and unexpected as the flight of a humming-bird. Calderón's rocked with applause. Adulation was still new to her; yet somehow, to-night, she could not capture the thrill. Her triumph seemed stale.

Some one pushed her back into the café to take her encore, and for a moment it seemed as if the hot, sweet air would stifle her, as if she could not lift her heavy feet in response to the expectancy on those flushed, smiling faces that pressed upon her. But with her first steps the present seemed to fade. She ceased to be a barefoot dancer of India, and was instead a barefoot little girl dancing in a country meadow—urchin, fairy, wood-sprite, with only a grave-eyed little boy sprawled on the ground for spectator.

Fernald was leaning across his table, tense, aflame. He had had several cocktails from his own well-stocked cellars before he came, but he was not drunk. It was typical of Fernald that he never had been drunk even in those merry days before the eighteenth amendment. Behind his avid desire for a good time was a far-sightedness that made him weigh his joys with an eye to what each would bring him in the end. There was a cold-bloodedness about Fernald's pursuit of pleasure that passed among certain people for restraint, and at this higher estimate Radiance had accepted him. She did not recognize in him that most dangerous of materialists—the man who tempers excess with a selfish shrewdness. But to-night, as she swung near his table and caught the naked passion of his look, she sensed another Fernald from the one she had known, an inner man, and for the first time she felt a hint of dislike.

She made another of her quick exits, the applause surging after her, beating dully upon the closed door of her dressing-room. She began pulling at the fastenings of her costume, impatient even of the deft-fingered Lois. She was in a fever to get away before Fernald sent for her, away from the closeness of the café where she could breathe and think. But as she stood at last ready for the street, there was a rap on the door and Calderón's sleek head thrust itself inside.

"The Señor Fernald waits," he announced with the foreign phrasing he affected.

Radiance frowned, tempted even then to make an excuse. But a shade of threat behind the little Spaniard's ingratiating smirk decided her upon the easiest course, and with a shrug she pushed past him into the crowded, shifting-scened café.

As she came toward Fernald, there was on his round face the triumphant pride of the man who knows himself envied. But as she dropped into the chair opposite, his expression changed.

"You don't act very chipper," he complained.

"Tired."

"After we've had a bite I'll take you for a spin. That will smooth out the kinks."

"I'm not in a spinning mood, Bob. But—" there was an odd hesitance in her words—"there's something I should like to do, to-morrow: a gallop in Golden Gate Park. I haven't ridden since—I left home." It was an impulse born of those haunting memories. How often, as a girl, she had raced her little mare against Edward Mackay's big roan down the dusty road—past the apple-trees fluffy with blossoms!

Fernald's mouth curved into a boyish grin. His stables were one of his passions. Fernald was nearing forty, but when he smiled that way his face took on a peculiarly youthful look.

"Horses it is! But why the peevishness with the car?"

"Tired, I've told you." She laughed shakily. "I think I've been having too much gaiety lately. Some girls can seem to go and go. But I'm finding I have limits. I can't do my best work, *artistic* work, if I burn the candle at both ends."

He studied her musingly as he gave the waiter his order. When they were left to themselves he, said: "Funny little girl you! The strictness of a Puritan and the fascination of a courtesan. That's what gets a man. It gets *me!*" Under cover of the table his plump, warm hand closed suddenly upon hers. "Did you ever wonder why I have clung to my freedom so long? Ever think I might——?"

She shook her hand free and rose quickly, her cheeks colorless. "Take me home, Bob.

It's the heat and this heavy odor of flowers. I keep smelling apple-blossoms. They—they make me ill."

He pushed back his chair and got to his feet, all that veneer of boyish pleasantry blotted out. She felt that he was angry with her for some reason beyond the obvious, as if by being tired and ill she had interfered with his pleasure.

He was gloomily silent as he drove her to her little up-town hotel, but as they stepped into the tiny, deserted lobby his mood lightened. He was again the boyish Fernald, the good fellow. He made arrangements for meeting her on the morrow; gaily planned their day. And then, seeing that the drowsy night clerk had turned away, he stooped swiftly and kissed her full upon the lips.

"That is to dream on!" he said thickly. "You put me off to-night, but you're going to marry me nevertheless. And to-morrow you'll tell me so." At the doorway he touched his finger-tips lightly to his lips. "Nightie-night, little Puritan dancing-girl!"

HE WAS his most jolly, likable self when they met in the park the next afternoon. The day was cold, gusty, gray, threatening rain; but nothing could dampen Fernald's wild spirits. It was this bubbling element in him that blinded Radiance to his grosser qualities. And sitting his nervous bay mare he was at his best, a handsome, powerful man, with a certain magnetic allure that was lost in the hot, overcolorful café.

As they took the bridle-path toward the ocean, the bracing sting of salt air in their faces, Radiance felt herself slipping again under the spell of his charm, and she began to come out of the maze of doubts and faint distrust in which she had struggled through the night.

In the cold, calculating light of day she could weigh what marriage with Fernald meant. It might not fulfil her romantic girlish dreams of love, but in a larger sense it was the culmination of all for which she had yearned and slaved. She would dance, dance, dance—but not in cafés. Life for Fernald's wife would be an endless play-day. No more snatching of joys, as in these last few years, with an eye ever on boundaries and barriers.

Why had she allowed a fancied whiff of apple-blossoms to disturb her? The apple orchard was linked inseparably with those tragic memories of her mother, and it symbolized her own stinted, humdrum girlhood. Why, the stupid little town had made its name on apples! They stood for all that was staid and dull and dreary, for all to which Edward Mackay would have tied her. Apple-blossoms—the very thought——

"Well?" Fernald cut in shrewdly on her revery. "What's the answer, little Puritan dancing-girl?"

"I'll marry you, Bob."

He laughed softly, and she had a moment's hot shame that he should be so sure of her; that he had had to woo her so little. She felt that she could not endure just then his passionate endearments, the caress in his eyes. She whirled her horse's head round sharply, with the lowering sky for an excuse.

"If we don't make a break for home, the storm will catch us!"

Even as she spoke there was an angry spatter in her face and a gust of wind beat the breath back into her throat.

Fernald turned, dismayed. "We'll never make it!"

His glance traveled across the road to the shelter of the Park Museum. "You run in there," he ordered. "I'll have the horses stabled somewhere near, and phone Pierre to bring round the car."

She wandered aimlessly through the galleries, so that she came upon the little canvas quite by accident. "On the Way to the Wedding," it was called, and was the painting that had first won recognition for Pedro Duran. It showed a gay bridal party, on foot and on horse, setting out through the blue Andalusian Mountains of Duran's native Spain; and Radiance had posed for the white-gowned girlish *novia* who sat in the gorgeously decorated cart in the foreground. But she had never seen the painting finished; did not guess that it hung here.

The artist appeared to have splashed color with a palette knife: the sky, the mountains, the gaudy festival attire of the party, the gay trappings of the horses. The girl in the cart was the one spot of white—yet all the color seemed concentrated upon her, as if that shining joy on her face were a leaping flame that illuminated all.

Radiance stood awed. What had the

artist done to her? The Spanish-dark features of the little bride were hers. But that glow from within— No! Life had never given her anything to make her look like that.

It held her hypnotically. She wanted to sit down and study it. She had been looking at the canvas over the top of a high-backed settee, but as she came round to the side she saw that the seat was not empty. A white-haired man was slumped there, thin hands gripping the head of his cane, chin resting upon them. He was staring tensely at the painting, cheeks flushed, lips drawn tight, his whole body, as it were, strained to the breaking-point.

RADIANCE stopped, her hand at her throat. Oh, it couldn't be! A man didn't age that fast in only six years! And anyway, what would he be doing there?

Panic seized her and she fled. She stood trembling within the doorway of the adjoining room, assuring herself that it couldn't be. It simply could *not* be! It was some old artist; a friend, a patron of young Duran's—his old master, perhaps. She watched a guard come through the gallery and pause beside the solitary figure, saying something with a friendly smile. She would ask *him*.

As he passed her she stopped him, bravely casual. "Is that old gentleman in there a famous painter? He seems so terribly intent."

The guard shook his head. "Scientist, Miss. Nice old chap from the country. We chat sometimes. He drops in once a month or so, and goes straight to that painting. Most folks take a fancy to that picture, but *he* makes a sort of shrine of it. Looks like an old sweetheart, I guess."

Radiance tried to speak, but her throat felt tight and constricted, as though she were going to cry. She was glad her face was in shadow.

"He has been breaking lately," the guard volunteered further, when she made no answer. "And to-day, when I spoke to him, he just stared at that girl's face in a queer, dazed way and said, 'She must come home—home! I must take her home.' What do you know about that? *She* did him dirt, I guess."

The pull on her sympathies was snapped. Radiance was suddenly bitter and hard. Out of the flood of cruel memories there floated back her mother's dying words: "If joy comes your way, take it. Don't let them rob you." Her father wanted to rob her! He would steal the happiness within her grasp and fasten her feet with the old wicked chains! She did not attempt to reason about his coming, nor try to explain how he meant to find her and take her back. It was enough that he had said she must come home.

She broke away, almost rudely, from the garrulously friendly guard. Fernald was entering the museum as she reached the door and she clung nervously to his side, anxiously watching the deserted roadway for Pierre, hardly conscious of what she said or of the fury of the storm.

As she sank into the cushioned depths of the luxurious blue limousine, she sighed with audible relief.

Fernald patted her hand. "Like it, don't you? The car is my engagement gift. And Pierre goes with it."

The old humble gratitude welled up in her heart. It made her pathetically eager to assent to all of Fernald's plans.

He sketched them rapidly: After her dance at Calderón's to-mororow night they would motor to the Fernald place in Burlingame, where minister and guests would be waiting. They would have the ceremony and wedding-supper there—his sister would see to all that! Then—a honeymoon cruise on the Pacific, the islands, India and Japan.

She objected timidly that Calderón might not let her go at such short notice. But Fernald laughed at her reassuringly.

"You just leave everything to little old Bob!"

To be sure! She laughed back at him with the merry, reckless laughter of madcap Janet Channing.

All the next day the magic thrill persisted. It was one of those portentous pranks of Fate that led her, on entering Calderón's that evening, to buy a paper of a ragged little newsboy, and to glance over it idly while she waited her turn. She was laying it aside when a headline leaped at her:

NOTED PAINTING STOLEN FROM PARK MUSEUM.

Duran's Masterpiece Cut from Frame and Carried Off. No Clue Yet to Thief.

There was but little more. The painting was taken, it was surmised, shortly before closing hour, when the museum was practically deserted owing to the storm, and when the guard was engaged elsewhere. The museum authorities were puzzled to know why canvases of far greater value in the same room were unharmed.

Radiance laid the paper down, her heart thumping madly.

"He couldn't have cared that much!" she argued wildly. And in refutation came back those strange words of the guard: "*He* makes a shrine of it." A shrine!

From the café came the tinkle of mandolins and guitars, the click of castanets, a man's voice raised in the toreador song. It was the opening night of Spain's week at Calderón's.

In the girl's ears was only the beating of her thoughts. Dimly recalled medical terms flitted tauntingly: amnesia—aphasia—sudden stress of illness, sudden loss of memory and individuality by which a man was unaccountable for his acts.

The friendly guard would not suspect that "nice old chap from the country"—at first. But suspicion would grow. Then—her father's name, revered in the world of science, would be dragged through the courts besmirched. It might even mean worse——

"Oh, God!" she tortured herself. "Whatever he has done to me, I—I couldn't let him face *that!*"

All the time common sense was telling her that it could not be; that not even in a moment of mental aberration could Matthew Channing have done this thing.

"Oh, I must find out! I must *know,*" she told herself.

From the café came a clatter of tambourines. Radiance plunged into the circle of light, pirouetting, laughing, the spirit of carnival incarnate. As she swung near Fernald's table there was an unconscious quiver to her lips, an appeal in her eyes. After all, he was hers, the one person in the world she had a right to call upon for help.

But the flushed face he lifted held in its triumphant passion something brutal, possessive, something that had slipped its leash. As never before, she glimpsed that inner man, the selfish materialist who would brook no interference with his will and pleasure.

Her smile clung frozenly to her lips as she reached her dressing-room.

"I can't tell him," she admitted dully. "He would never understand. He would never let me go."

She had to return to the café and dance again. It seemed as if she would never finish dancing. When at last she was free to go, she did not take time to change from her dancer's costume and slippers, but drew on her cloak and hastily jammed her little silk toque on her dark hair. She must not risk being stopped now. She took a memorandum sheet from her purse and scribbled: "My father is ill and in trouble and I am getting Pierre to take me home. You must know the case is desperate or I would not leave this night of nights. To-morrow I shall come back, and explain, if you still want me back——" She drew an expressive dash, and left the message there. The decision rested with him. If his love was big enough——

She folded the paper and thrust it, with a greenback, into the hand of the astonished maid.

"When Mr. Fernald sends for me, Lois, give him this note; but not before."

She hated to make use of Pierre and the blue car, although they were now hers to command. It was as if, in deserting their giver in this fashion, she had forfeited her right. But she dared not trust a strange chauffeur on the long, lonely highway, doubly dangerous by reason of the drizzling rain; and no train left for Watsonville until morning. A few hours might mean everything—not only to her father, but to her. Intuition warned her that if Fernald would not let her go *now*, much less would he let her go when once he held her in his arms as wife.

THE rain had ceased, and a pale, cheerless sun shed its thin warmth over the valley as the familiar station crept into sight. The town had spread out, solidified, but in the damp chill of morning it looked more bleak and cramped than ever. In her wild night journey Radiance had formed but one plan: to go to old Doctor Mackay and let him decide what best be done. She told Pierre he might return to the city. She did not wish to hold him a minute longer than necessary; nor did she relish courting attention with the smart blue car. She would get a man from the local garage to drive her the three miles to the doctor's.

It was a decided shock to encounter the "man" in Peter McCoy—a grizzled, bent Peter, as talkatively friendly as when he ran the little old livery-stable. He recognized her instantly, but without surprise.

"Came on the fly, eh?" he chuckled, helping her into his mud-spattered Ford. "When I heard the professor was sick, I thinks to myself, 'Ray'll be coming!' I often says to my wife, 'The only thing that keeps the poor old gentleman up, since Sary went East and Lizzie Channing died, is being able to visit Ray in San Francisco.' "

Radiance looked at him queerly, but he chatted on.

"Your father never said much, but anybody could see that those trips were medicine to him. It was like you were the only one he had left after old Doctor Mackay passed out."

So they were dead—her aunt and the kind old Scotsman! And her sister had gone East.

Out of her daze she suddenly woke to the fact that Peter McCoy was turning into the road that led home. She could not let him take her *there!* For the first time there came to her the full madness of her act, the horrid sinking conviction that she had allowed impulse to carry her on a fool's errand. She had been crazy to suppose that her father could have done—what she imagined. She saw herself as a silly, frightened girl, returning to a parent who had cast her off, the prodigal daughter. At least, that is how he would receive her. Or would he receive her? Might he not rise up in his sick-bed——?

"I ought—I *must* see Doctor Edward Mackay before—before you take me home," she blurted.

"Oh, you'll see him!" Peter McCoy reassured comfortably. "He has stayed the night with your father, I reckon. He sure does take his work to heart—the young doctor! Yet he's never too busy to do a little more; never too tired to be joking. Sometimes, I think, it's people's souls he mends as much as their bodies. Some folks say he's foolish not to cut loose and go to San Francisco. And he has had two good offers. But he says country germs are just as interesting as city germs and heaps less doctors after 'em. Always has his fun—the young doctor."

Radiance settled back in her seat in limp subservience to fate. If she must go to her father's, she must. Strange how the thought of Edward Mackay's being there filled her with relief!

While Peter McCoy gossiped in her ear, her mind was busy piecing two and two together. She was beginning to understand her father's visits to the city—this long pretense of the proud, lonely old man, making tacit defense of his daughter before the world. His pride and sense of honor had always ridden him hard. But why had he sat in the picture-gallery pretending to himself? That remained as much a mystery as the stealing of the painting.

Peter McCoy set her down at the gate. With a feeling of shocked hush she walked up the gravel path through the muddy desolation of the garden. In memory she had seen it always in its fluffy, fragrant, well-cared-for beauty. The house, too, looked run down and shabby; the laboratory dingy and neglected—as if all in which Matthew Channing once gloried had shared in some quiet disintegration.

OLD Mary, the housekeeper, opened the door. She was plainly startled; yet it seemed less surprise than a sort of pious awe.

"The Lord sent you, Miss Ray! Your father has been crying your name all night."

"Is he very ill, Mary?"

The old servant sniffled subduedly. "Well, you know he never was the same after you went away—though he did brave it out wonderful. But he began to fail right fast after old Doctor Mackay died. And lately he ain't hardly eat or slept, getting no comfort out of his test-tubes even. The other morning he was having chills and fever, but he would go to the city—though I told him you wouldn't want him to. And when he got home he was took bad. He's better now, praise the Lord! The young doctor's with him."

"Shall I go up, Mary?"

"His door is open. Perhaps you could motion to the doctor."

Those light, dancing feet in their soggy, dirty slippers sped noiselessly up the stairs. Clinging to the banisters she peered across the shadowed hall into her father's room. Only the foot of the bed was visible. But standing, with back turned, was Edward

Mackay, his eyes uplifted to where the glorified face of the little Spanish bride smiled down from the wall in benediction.

From the bed came Matthew Channing's feeble, halting voice. "You'll make it right with the museum, Ed? I must have been mad; and yet—it was very real. Ever since I learned about that painting—it was as if I had found my little girl. I was saving money to buy the picture. It was about *that* that I went the other day. And then—Ray seemed to call to me. I thought she was standing there—in her bridal gown—and she was in trouble. I wanted to get her home. She was mine. That picture— It is all dim, confused, but I couldn't bear the thought of folks staring at her——"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Channing. God knows I understand! And others will understand." Edward Mackay slowly took the canvas from the wall and rolled it up.

There was a sigh from the bed. "I wish I could believe my little Ray would wear that look on her face some day; that it wasn't only a painting. What's that the Bible says, 'Better that a millstone were hanged about a man's neck——'"

The doctor moved swiftly to the head of the bed. "Don't talk, Mr. Channing."

"It's my fault—if she—has stumbled. I was stern with her—too stern. It was wrong. All wrong."

"She has not stumbled."

There was a quiet surety in the strong young voice that brought a lump to the girl's throat.

"I loved her better than life—and so—I was harsh," the sick man quavered. "I thought it the only course to take with a wild young spirit like hers. Sarah was safe. But Ray—Ray was lovely and wilful like her mother; and the world is hard on such women. My wife was just a child when I met her—a pretty, spoiled, adorable little schoolgirl. There was a man—a cur of a man—" Radiance heard him turn in bed—"and she was only a child——"

"Don't try to tell me," the doctor begged.

"When he threw her aside for the next pretty face—I married her. Your father knew! I tried to interest her in my work. I thought it would steady her. Because I loved her I was severe. I made the same mistake—with the girl. I drove her out. And now——"

"I am going to find her and bring her home!"

RADIANCE heard rustlings and the clink of glass; knew that the doctor was doing something for the sick man. Gradually the labored breathing became regular, and at last Edward Mackay walked round from behind the bed. Then—he saw her.

He drew a deep, unsteady breath, came out and closed the door.

"Your father is asleep," he said simply. "And now that you have come he will get well."

It was like him to reassure her thus quickly; to make of the terrible moment a commonplace. Her eyes were hot with unshed tears. Her throat was dry.

"I didn't know! I never dreamed!" she said. "Oh, you must know I didn't understand!"

He took one of her trembling hands in both of his. "It is enough to know that you are here."

In the fierce pressure of his grip and in the flame that leaped to his eyes, she glimpsed, for an instant, the lover. Then he was again the physician. She saw him glance at her wet, muddy slippers.

"You're like ice. Come! We'll get Mary to bundle you up and make you something hot to drink."

As he propelled her forward, an arm across her shoulders, her tears welled suddenly. His tenderness had opened once more the floodgates of memory: apple-blossoms and moonlight in the garden; old Doctor Mackay saying, "From a lad he has fought your battles, little girl."

At last she knew! In her heart she had known from the moment that she found she could not go to Fernald in her trouble; had known even when she scrawled that cowardly promise to return. A fair-weather lover—Fernald! But life was not all fair weather. There were times when you wanted to put your hand in another's——

"Ed," she said, in a low, uneven voice, "was it true—what you told father? Would you have come after me?"

She felt the quick muscular contraction of his arm, the tumult of his heart.

"And if I had, Ray?" he answered slowly.

A sob tore her, but on her face was the glory of the little Spanish bride. "Oh, Ed, why didn't you come for me long ago!"

Grim Western Drama Tempered by Humor

Find the Maverick

The Author of "Desert Justice" and "The Pinto Stallion" Introduces Us to a New West, as Far as Fiction is Concerned. And, by the Way, What is a Maverick?

By Honoré Willsie

Illustrations by Paul V. E. Ivory

JUST at present, Gregory Alvord lives in a sheep-herder's wagon. But in spite of this fact he is a cowman as his father was before him. To locate his cattle-ranch, you must know the cow country of the northern Rockies and you must know the remote upper valleys of the Indian Fire range and you must know old Coyote Mountain and John's Mountain and Death Peak with the Ash Creek ranches sprawling at their gigantic feet.

You must know, too, the black clump of cedars that clings to the lowest hump of John's Mountain and you must ride a horse broken to the leaping of buried ditches and to the breasting of great snows; an Ash Creek horse, deep-skilled in the following of vicious trails. Thus informed and equipped, Greg's home would not be difficult for you to find.

The log cabin burned just before old man Alvord's death, about two years before Greg returned from France. When Greg rode into Ash Creek with his gas-mask and his steel hat dangling from Two-bits' pommel, there was not a relative left to greet him. However, Ash Creek turned out in a body and gave him a dance at the schoolhouse on the evening of his return and Greg accepted the welcome with unembarrassed pleasure. It was four o'clock in the morning when the party ended.

"Where's dad's sheep wagon?" Greg asked the postmaster.

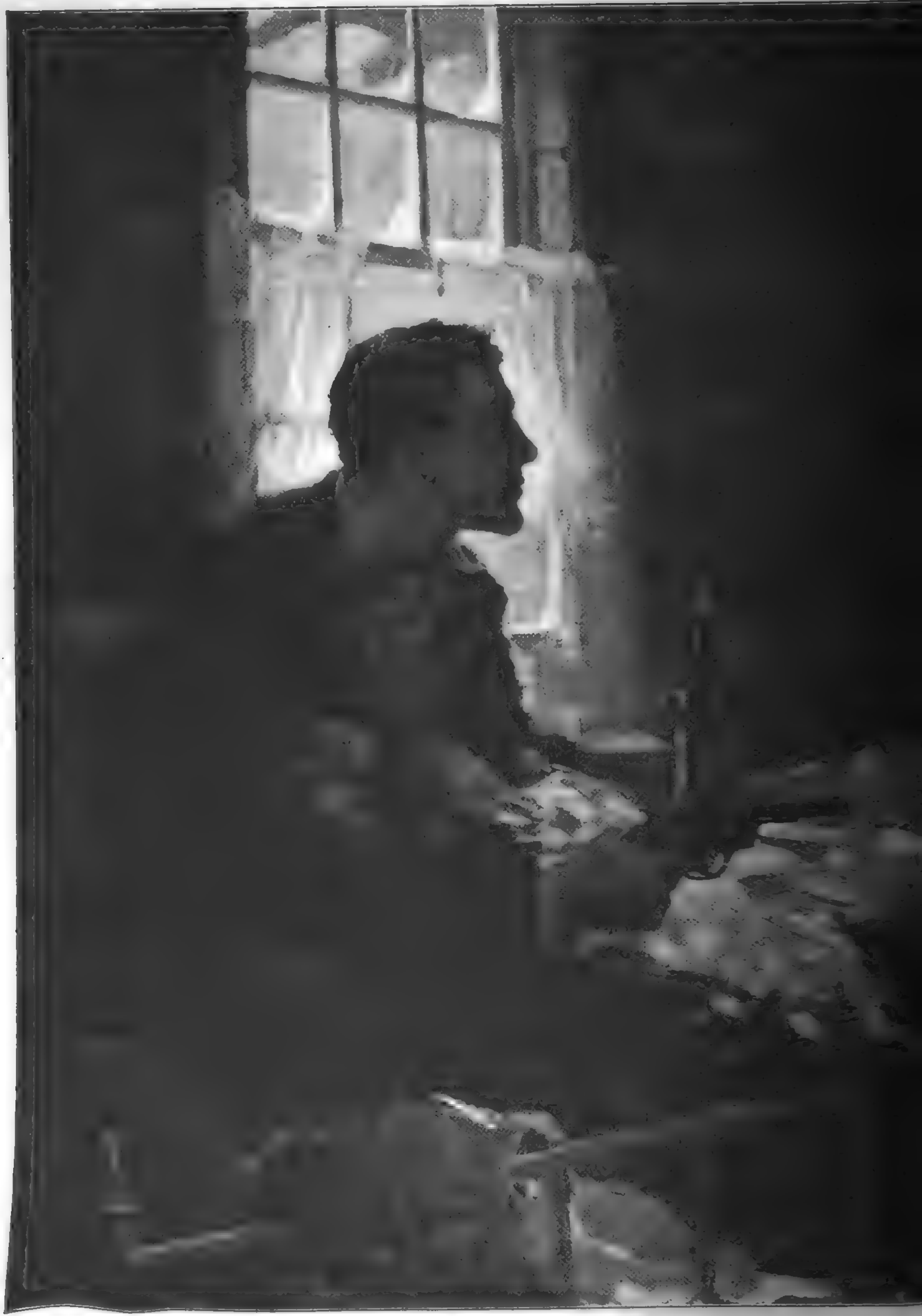
"In the cedars, near the ruins of the old place," replied the older man.

A gunny sack of food across his knees, Greg rode away under the stars. It was late in the afternoon of the same day when he appeared at the post-office. And he was very easy to look at! He stood six-feet-one or so in his riding-boots; his eyes were clear and brown, his skin red, his teeth were white and perfect. He was slender and very quick in his movements. He wore a new outfit that was correct in every detail. Certainly there was none better in the upper country except, perhaps, Artie Young's. On his curly black hair he wore a brown Stetson sombrero with a pile as deep as moleskin. A crimson-silk neckerchief was knotted under his chin. His short leather coat was brown and as soft as a suède glove. His brown-leather chaps were studded with silver button-heads that were pointed up with blue enamel. His black riding-boots were elaborately stitched on the front of the legs. From his wide rider's belt depended rings and clasps that tinkled pleasantly as did his silver spurs. Dangling below the rider's belt was a gun-belt from which hung Greg's old six-shooters.

There was a group of riders, dingy replicas of Greg, standing around the rusty heater. The stove-lid was off, for there was no cuspidor, and the postmaster, who was the only man in Ash Creek who did not chew, was careful with the mail-sacks.

"Where you going, Greg?" asked the postmaster. "After wolverenes?"

"No; just going over the sights a little,"



When Newt and the postmaster and half a dozen others crowded into the cabin, two hours later, t

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baby was asleep on Greg's knee. The hand that supported the baby's back still held the six-shooter.

replied Greg as he squinted along the barrel of his saddle gun.

"Where'd you get your outfit?" asked Willy Archer, a heavy blond rider, five years Greg's senior.

"Denver. Say, Willy, how's my herd done since my father died? He left you in charge of them, the lawyers wrote me."

"Not so good, Greg. This is the worst winter ever known in these parts. We've all lost lots of cattle, you with the rest."

"It wouldn't be so bad if the drought last summer hadn't sure burned up the grass. Dust blew from my ditches all summer." Dick Benton renewed his supply of plug sadly. "I found ten yearlings buried in a drift after last week's blizzard. That makes a hundred head even to date for me."

"I've lost forty head of cattle and five horses that I know of," said Artie Young. "My old woman lost the bull she'd raised by hand and she's made more fuss over it than I have over everything else."

"I been cutting down quiverin' asp for my herd," volunteered Willy.

"Sure it wasn't to bile raisin-jack with?" asked the postmaster, grinning, and then adding soberly, "Willy, does that tramp trapper that come in a month ago board at your place?"

"He does so. He's got a mess of beaver skins now that he's afraid to take out to Indian Arrow."

"Newt Jonas, he was drunk last night and he told me he'd seen my cattle all over the place; down at the Ames ranch, and at Benton's and running wild," said Greg.

"Newt Jonas is a nut when he's sober and plumb locoed when he's drunk!" exclaimed Dick Benton. "I ain't seen any of your brand lately except on Willy's place."

"Same here!" agreed the others.

"I thought that was about what you'd say," nodded Greg. "I'm willing to have suffered as much winter-killing as the rest of you, but I don't aim to suffer more. And while I didn't have a chance to study brands in France, I don't think I've lost what I knew when I left home. That's what I aim to do now—go out and prove I ain't lost my skill in that line. Any new women in the upper country since I left?"

"Nobody but the schoolma'am. You saw her last night," replied the postmaster. "Do you still aim to be the chief woman-crook in Ash Creek County, Greg?"

Greg whirled to look at the postmaster. The little man was sorting second-class mail, and did not falter under the younger man's fierce gaze.

"Better take back the crooked part of it, Uncle Sam," said Greg quietly.

"Humph!" grunted the postmaster. "I ain't afraid of you, Greg Alvord, any more now than when you were a kid. I've always noted that a cowman that was crooked with women was never so almighty fierce as the women believed."

"What's eating you, Uncle Sam?" demanded Greg belligerently.

The old man threw a mail-order catalog against a package of eggs. "Nothing's eating me. I'm just getting a warning off my chest. I knowed Clarissa Hackett's mother. I'd have married her if she hadn't thought Hackett was a better man than me. And if she'd lived, I believe Clarissa'd be alive and decent to-day. At least as decent as man, woman or child can be a hundred miles from civilization."

The group about the stove spat and was silent. The postmaster, little, vitriolic, with a mysterious past, said what he wished in Ash Creek.

Finally Greg jerked his handsome head. "Well, what about Clarissa?"

"You know what about her and you know what she told me before she died in childbed a few months after you went away."

Greg strode over to the postmaster and wrenched another catalog out of the old man's hands. "What are you trying to start, you snarling little wolverene, you?"

The postmaster tapped Greg on the chest. "You run along and hunt cattle, Greg. I know you. I got a sixteen-year-old niece that's coming to live with me in the spring. Some day, I hope to God your heart will be broke by having a daughter of your own come to Clarissa's pass. In the mean time, you keep away from my niece."

For a moment the old man and the young man glared at each other. Then, with an oath, Greg slammed out of the building.

THUS more or less inauspiciously began Greg's hunt for his herd. Greg always had been a prime favorite in the lonely little valley. Easy-going, care-free, generous, his morals only a shade more lax than those of his neighbors, the only enemy Greg had possessed before the war had been Willy

Archer. Willy had money, which he hoarded like a miser, had good looks and a way with women. The two men had fought over Mary Smith, and Willy had won her. Neither would ever forgive the things said and done during that rival courtship. Ash Creek had looked on with eager interest, popular sympathy all with young daredevil Greg.

BUT the Great War had changed Greg. The boyishness that had made much of his charm had given way to hardness. He went about his cattle-hunting with a cold directness that set the valley by the ears. No one's herd was exempt from suspicion and inspection. Even Newt Jonas was moved to resentful wrath.

"You get off'n my ranch and you stay off, Greg!" he said one bitter February morning when he had found Greg riding slowly through his tiny herd. "I don't conject to stand for it."

"I'm looking for a maverick bull of mine that Willy should have branded for me. He is about two years old, out of that little Jersey heifer of mine and that old bull, Commodore, who Willy claims froze early in December. The maverick was born about two months after dad died, according to Aunty Ames."

"I ain't got him. Ain't a bull in this herd. You caruse off'n this ranch, Greg Alvord."

"Didn't you know the maverick, Newt? Come now; don't you go on lying to me like the rest of 'em! Why, man, I've only been able to collect five hundred of my herd so far. I tell you, I'm going to shoot this valley up if somebody don't loosen up pretty soon."

"Yes, I know him. He was a deciduous big brute for a two-year-old. Willy had lots of trouble with him. Last time I seen him was in November after a blizzard. He come blowing into my corral and fit a long battle with a hide I had hanging on the fence. I peppered him with my .22 and I ain't saw him since. Now you get out, Greg!"

Newt was riding bareback, with a rough rope halter. He had not stopped to put on a coat and he shivered violently as the wind pierced his ragged flannel shirt and dirty blue overalls. Newt's ranch lay just at the foot of Coyote Mountain. Below the two men all of Ash Creek Valley stretched, deep in blue snow, with the far, rose-etched line of quivering aspens outlining hidden Ash Creek. Peak after peak, half concealed by the wind-driven snow, lifted abruptly from the edges of the valley. Greg drew a long breath of the rarified air. One must breathe deep at seven thousand feet or starve for oxygen.

"Funny how I've lost all my friends," he said. "I'll go up to Burton's now. I hear he's thick with that tramp trapper Willy's chumming up with. Whoever's hiding that maverick bull is going to regret it "

"That trapper ain't wasting any time on mavericks," said Newt. "I ain't made up my mind yet just what is reversing him, but when I finish dehorning I'm going to look into it."

"He don't interest me. What I'm interested in is a bull maverick."

"Maybe he ain't a maverick any more," suggested Newt.

"Was there a brand onto him when you saw him?" demanded Greg.

"I was too mad to look. Lord; what's come to Willy?"

A horseman was careering madly up the scarce-broken trail that led to Archer's ranch on Coyote Mountain. He turned into Newt's place, leaped the hidden irrigation ditch and brought his frothing horse to its haunches before Two-bits, who promptly thrust his head forward and bit the panting mare on the cheek.

"Somebody shot Dick Benton last night!" cried Willy. "He was lying back of the corral, his head on a stone. The posse's forming now. I'm going home for a fresh horse."

"Must have been rebranding somebody's cattle besides mine!" grunted Greg. "Where'd they hit him?"

"In the heart. You folks better come on and help." Willy's teeth were chattering. "But he wasn't very bloody. I'm glad of that, anyhow."

His two hearers looked at Willy curiously. Willy wheeled his horse and was off, chaps flapping, spurs ringing.

"Get a coat and come on, Newt," said Greg.

The little man gave him a strange look out of his wistful, half-dazed blue eyes.

"I ain't going to be seen with you," and he trotted his horse toward the cabin.

Greg gave an enigmatic grunt and headed

Two-bits toward Benton's. When he reached the dead man's house, Maggie Benton met him at the door.

"You needn't come in here, Greg Alvord!" she cried shrilly. "It was only yesterday you was accusing him of cattle-stealing. It's too late to make up for it now!"

Greg looked at Maggie keenly. She stood in her dirty calico wrapper surrounded by the snow-covered débris of the dooryard, her hair uncombed, her face tear-stained. Greg wondered what he had seen in her to feed an affair that had lasted for six months before her marriage. But under his young hardness he felt a stirring of pity.

"I'm sure sorry for you, Maggie," he said. "Which way did the posse go?"

"They scattered. You needn't pity me now. Save your pity for yourself or for some other woman you plan to treat like you did me."

"You didn't need pity then. You had your eye-teeth cut. Are you fixed for grub and such?"

Maggie's answer was to slam the door in his face. Greg shrugged his shoulders and jingled out of the dooryard. An hour later he came upon the postmaster and Willy Archer, who thought they had detected a snow-blown trail in Ash Creek cañon. The three drew up in the shelter of a blue spruce to confer. Willy took a nervous bite of plug.

"Did you and Dick have a fight yesterday, Greg?" he asked.

"We sure did. We didn't come to blows, but we might have if Dick hadn't retracted. I know he rebranded two of my old milch cows. And I put that and my maverick bull up to him. He was the meanest cuss in Ash Creek Valley next to you, Willy."

Willy scowled heavily. Greg paused, struck by the look in the postmaster's eyes. Then he laughed. "Oh, I can give an alibi! I scrapped with Benton yesterday morning and I spent the rest of the day down studying Ames' herd with old Ames raising the devil with me every minute."

"The postmaster nodded. "I see Benton at noon."

"He was a Mormon," said Willy. "Who is the worst Mormon-hater round here?"

"Oh, he was just a Jack-Mormon!" exclaimed Greg. "He hadn't paid his tithes since he was married."

"He and Artie Young was heading up that bunch of Mormons that was talking of forming a sheep company," said the postmaster, blowing a speculative smoke ring.

"They both were courting gun-play, then," grunted Greg.

"Well, let's move on," suggested Willy. "It's awful cold standing here."

"You better go home, Willy, to be with Mary," said the postmaster. "She ain't fit to be left alone up there five miles from a neighbor. Or have you loosened up to the extent of getting Aunty Ames?"

"I wish you'd mind your own business, Uncle Sam!" cried Willy angrily. "Mary's just a spoiled kid and you helped spoil her."

"Spoiled kid!" shouted the postmaster. "If the men in Ash Creek worked like Mary Archer does, this would be the richest spot in the Rockies. You fellows chase the women and fight for 'em and run 'em like they was something invaluable till you marry 'em. Then you drive 'em like they was draft-horses. You're just too stingy and ornery, Willy, to let your wife have Aunty Ames when the baby comes."

"Aw, all the men in Ash Creek aren't rough with their wives," protested Greg.

"Show me one that's more than half-way decent!" snapped the postmaster. Then without waiting for an answer, he lifted his reins and started at a trot toward home. Greg followed him.

THE killing of Dick Benton was of course the seven days' horror and wonder of Ash Creek. It almost submerged the interest in Greg Alvord's search for the herd. No trace was found of the murderer, and an ugly half-suspicion rested on Greg. But the dead man had made several bitter enemies in the valley by his attempts to bring sheep onto the range. There was much confusion of motive and evidence, and after a week or so the hunt rested.

Here, there and everywhere, Greg picked up his cattle. A little herd of a baker's dozen was running free in the shelter of Coyote Cañon, lean and wild, but in fair trim. He frightened two coyotes away that were feasting on a fine three-year-old steer. The brute had fallen on the side of John's Mountain, head down-hill, and so, unable to rise, had frozen to death. He routed fifteen steers out of a hidden corral in a swamp on Benton's ranch, where Dick evidently had been making preparations to dispose of the animals. But the maverick bull he could not find.

He had no other young bull so promising in his herd. He felt sure that unless coyotes had finished the brute, he could be traced. Yet it was a large and lonely task to which the young rider had set himself. Ash Creek country was big country. Blue range lifting beyond blue range, snow-choked valley opening into drifted cañon. A man could maintain a secret corral for months at a time, and for many days Greg's search was fruitless.

One afternoon Greg and Two-bits were wallowing through the snow at the edge of the Forest Reserve below Death Peak. Greg had hoped to get up into the reserve, but had found it impossible to do so. Even the deer-trails were waist-deep. Greg was just considering returning to the sheep wagon when he saw a smudge of fire under a lone cedar. As he drew near it the tramp trapper was distinguishable thrusting something hurriedly into a gunny sack.

"Two-bits," murmured Greg, "I wonder just why he wants me to think he's hiding pelts. I'll bet you anything he's a revenue officer. Or, and also, he might be more interested in hides than pelts!"

By the time Two-bits had drawn up to the fire with a snort and a sigh, the trapper was sitting on the sack, smoking. He was a grizzled-haired man who looked more like a trader than a trapper.

"Still looking for that bull?" he asked Greg pleasantly.

"I sure am! What luck are you having? Better'n mine, I hope!"

The trapper grinned, showing long yellow teeth, but he did not reply.

"Still boarding with Willy?" asked Greg.

"No. His wife ain't strong, and so I'm stopping with Mrs. Benton for a while."

"How is Mary? I haven't seen her since I got back."

"If she was my wife I'd have had her up to Indian Arrow a month ago," replied the trapper.

Greg's mouth twisted. "I wish I could prove that Willy had rebranded that maverick," he said. "I reckon he'd have a good reason for neglecting Mary then. If ever I glom my hands on him——"

"Oh, Willy's not so bad, except I've heard he'd do most anything for money." The trapper watched Greg keenly. "But there is plenty of us will do the same. He's been good enough to me. His wife is an unusual sweet girl, though."

Both men stared thoughtfully at the fire, the trapper now and again stealing a cunning glance at Greg.

"I'm thinking," said the trapper, "that you cowmen ain't going to clean up as much this year as us trappers. Furs is worth their weight in gold."

"Range is getting scarce between the homesteaders and the sheep-men and there ain't the money there was in cattle," agreed Greg.

"The sheep-men make money," suggested the trapper.

"They won't in this valley. We'd have run Dick Benton out as sure as he ever put a flock in his corral."

"That's the way a good many folks feel, I guess," nodded the trapper.

"Cow business is still good enough for me," Greg went on. "When I get my herd together, I'll try to raise me enough money to rebuild my cabin and I'll go in for all it's worth."

The trapper refilled his pipe. "I know a guy that has some money to invest. He might take a mortgage from you or even better."

Greg's face was expressionless. "Money is awful hard to raise now."

"I know that. But this guy has big interests. Made his money in cattle and is always glad to help out a cattleman. And it's to the cattlemen's interests to stand together against the sheep-men."

"Well"—Greg tapped Two-bits with a spur—"come round to the sheep wagon some evening and we'll talk."

"I will do," said the trapper.

IT WAS not, however, at the sheep wagon that Greg was to discover what kind of proposition the tramp trapper had in mind. He wearied after a while of the long, bitter, lonely days in the saddle and of the cold glances of his old-time friends, and he decided to pacify Ash Creek by giving a dance at the schoolhouse. Ash Creek was jaded after a terrible winter. The murder of Dick Benton had strained everybody's nerves, though killings were not so unknown in the valley as to be severely shocking. Greg's search had been profoundly irritating and the valley was by no means unsuspicious as to his relation to Benton's unhappy demise. The community of a dozen scattered families was in a mood to welcome the diversion of a dance given by any one but Greg Alvord. Coming from him, however, the invitation was for a time received coldly. However, when it became known that old Tim Watts was coming down from Indian Arrow with his fiddle and that there was to be "raisin-jack" for everybody, Ash Creek capitulated.

IT WAS twelve degrees below zero the night of the party, with a full moon sailing high. John Frisbie and his wife from nine miles up the creek appeared first, Mame with the baby in her arms and a five-year-old behind the saddle. John rode with a three-year-old in his lap. They rushed to the red-hot stove. The two little Tupper girls, aged ten and twelve, appeared next. They had come nine miles alone on a single horse. By nine o'clock the whole of Ash Creek had arrived and by ten o'clock every one but the babes in arms had warmed up with the raisin-jack.

Willy Archer attempted to monopolize the schoolma'am, who was a slender young person from Iowa. But after the first few dances, Greg cut him out and Willy sulked over the stove. Greg found the schoolma'am's ignorance of the cow country infinitely diverting. He danced on and on. Now and again some one opened the outer door and the brilliant moonlit landscape was to be seen, all iridescent blues, with mighty mountains swimming in silence and serenity. The bitter wind would roar in, puffing out the single oil-lamp, some one would slam the door and the dance would continue, sombrero and ribboned braids sliding steadily past the silvered window. Then the lamp would be lighted, a new batch would start for the keg of raisin-jack and a new hilarity would seize the crowd.

"Tell me, Mr. Alvord," said the schoolma'am, watching a little uneasily as Greg disposed of another drink, "what is a maverick? They all say all you do is to hunt for mavericks."

"A maverick," said Greg gravely, "is a calf who has lost its mamma and its papa has gone off with another cow."

A shout went up from the crowd around the keg. The schoolma'am blushed and Greg, laughing, seized her round the waist and whirled her into the ugly lilt of a jazz waltz.

"I don't believe I'll ever get used to the ways of the cattle country!" exclaimed the girl. "It's rougher than I ever thought it would be. In the movies the cowboys are always so chivalrous! But I haven't seen a bit of chivalry since I came."

"Why? Have they treated you rough?" demanded Greg.

"No; not really, but wives round here don't seem to be made for anything but the hardest kind of work. They work much harder than the men. Is all the cow country like that?"

Before Greg could reply to this somewhat difficult question, the door swung open and once more the lamp blew out. Newt Jonas stood in the square of moonlight.

"Another killing!" he shouted above the music. "They done disponed of Art Young!"

Silence for a moment; then the postmaster exclaimed, "Who found him?"

"I did," replied Newt. "I was late to the party because I had to take some beef up to Willy Archer's, and I tried to take a short cut through Parker's draw and my horse stepped on him and r'ared and throwed me. He was lying with his head lifted up on a stone, all rejus and quiet-like. Hit in the heart. I rid like the devil was after me down here. I left the beef up with Artie."

A baby sneezed.

"Close that door!" snapped Mame Frisbie.

"Any tracks?" asked the postmaster when the door had been shut and the crowd had packed around Newt, shivering over the stove.

"I didn't stop to make no disservations."

The schoolma'am laughed hysterically. Greg patted her hand. "Don't get excited, little girl! Well, folks, I guess the party's over. Out we go to find the guy that's getting the killing-habit."

The younger Tupper girl, whom the raisin-jack had made very ill, began to cry with deep-drawn sobs: "I'm afraid to go home! I'm afraid to go home!"

"No need of you family men going out," said the postmaster. "They's enough of us bachelors to gum all the tracks in Ash Creek."

"You Tupper girls come home with me!" said the schoolma'am with sudden resumption of the authoritative manner.

There was a general whimpering of babies, a hushed preparation on the part of the elders and shortly the schoolhouse stood dark and alone while the out trails were dotted in the moonlight with swift-moving horses.

But the search was of no avail, and dark suspicion again hovered about Greg, who had fought bitterly and publicly with Artie over the matter of the maverick bull. Greg was away from home on the hunt for two days. When he came back to the sheep wagon, he started his fire going, then went to the corral to feed a fresh milch cow. She was lowing dismally and her two-weeks-old calf was not to be found.

Greg prowled about through the trampled snow for an hour, then he saw red, buckled on his guns again, put a rope round the bellowing mother's neck, saddled Two-bits, who had not been out on the man hunt, and said to the cow: "I can't locate her. Let's see if you can. And if you do, I'll shoot the thief on sight."

The cow started swiftly along the trail to Coyote Mountain, sniffing and bellowing as she went. She panted straight up the shoulder of the mountain to Archer's ranch, stopping only at the bars of the empty corral. The cow bellowed again and a calf bleated faintly. The cow went over the buck fence like a goat and began to horn savagely at a padlocked door in the stable. Greg broke the door open. Two calves were tied beside a cow which evidently was fresh. The calves looked enough alike to be sisters; but Greg's cow leaped to one of them and ceased her lowing to lick it ecstatically. It bore Willy's brand, as did the other, but to Greg the evidence was irrefutable.

"The dirty thief!" he exclaimed. "I've got him now!"

He pulled his six-shooter and rushed out of the corral to the house. Archer's cabin was a small log affair of two rooms, standing unsheltered near the corral. Greg threw open the door without ceremony. The kitchen with its one tiny window was bleak and empty. He strode into the inner room. There he paused. It was a small room, unceiled, with bare floor, spotlessly clean, furnished with a plain wooden chair or two, a pine bureau, and a small center-table. In the corner was a bed and on the bed lay a woman whose long yellow hair covered the pillow. Her profile against the log wall was exquisite.

"Mary, I'm looking for Willy!" stammered Greg.

Mary did not look at him. She was murmuring to herself.

"Mary! Mary!" cried Greg in sudden agony.

She opened her eyes and cried, "Greg, my hour has come!"

"I'll go for Aunty Ames!" exclaimed Greg.

Mary screamed and sobbed together,

"There's no time! Greg, help me! Help me!"

"How can I, girl? How can I? Yes! Yes! I'll stay with you. Yes! Don't scream so. Where is Willy?"

But Mary was again muttering nonsense on her pillow.

FIVE hours later, Greg, with a blanketed bundle in his arms, slid from Two-bits' back and jerked open the door of Newt Jonas's cabin. Newt was frying beefsteak over a red-hot fire. He turned a surprised and hostile face toward Greg. Greg looked haggard in the lamplight and his eyes were wild.

"I want you to take care of this baby for me," he said, "while I go out and shoot up Willy Archer."

Newt dropped the pan of sizzling meat on the floor. "What baby?"

"Mary's! She's dead! Up there, all alone! I tried to help her. No time to go for Aunty Ames. I thought maybe Willy had. And she's dead! Here, take the baby till I get back. But listen! She's my baby from now on. Get me?"

"You mean you're going to kill Willy?" asked Newt, not offering to take the bundle. "Why?"

"For letting Mary die alone up there, you fool! Here, take her! But remember, she's mine."

"But I never touched a baby in my life," whimpered Newt. "Take her to Aunty Ames. She'll dispone of her."

"While Willy gets away from me? Here, you take her! Keep her warm and give her a glass of milk or something if she cries."

Newt backed away. "You keep her and I'll—I'll shoot Willy for you!"

Greg's drawn face twitched with impatience. He laid the bundle on the bed and rushed out of the house, and Two-bits grunted despondently as Greg turned him again toward Coyote Mountain. As he turned off the main trail, he met the postmaster jogging homeward.

"Have you seen Willy Archer?" demanded Greg.

"No. What's the matter, Greg?"

"You go down to Aunty Ames' house and send her up to Newt's as quick as she can get there. Don't ask me questions. Newt will tell you," and Greg dug his spurs into Two-bits' bloody flanks.

Greg waited long in the Archers' barren little kitchen, keeping a good cedar fire going and not allowing himself to glance at the closed door into the bedroom. It was after ten o'clock when a sound of hoofs brought him to his feet. But it was Aunty Ames who came in. She was a thin little old lady with a sweet, wrinkled nut-cracker face, framed in curly white hair.

Before she could speak, Greg cried, "Where's the baby?"

"Down at Newt's. You don't suppose I had her out on a night like this! My heavenly Gawd, Greg, what happened to Mary?"

Greg's face set in ugly lines. "Willy left her alone. I did what I could. I'm going to shoot Willy as soon as he comes in."

Aunty Ames pulled off her mackinaw and lumberman's cap. "Can't shoot Willy for that. He neglected her, but he did intend to have me for one day. They didn't look for it till next week. He gave in to Uncle Sam on that yesterday. And I'd told Mary to send for me anyhow. I didn't want a cent."

"How could she send for you when she was alone? What are you sticking up for him for?"

"I ain't sticking up for him. I loved Mary as much as anybody. He should never have left this dooryard except to come for me." The old lady suddenly began to cry.

"Do you know where Willy is?" urged Greg.

"He might be over at Young's. He and Artie was going to make raisin-jack, and Lucy told him the night Artie was shot to come and hide the still. She didn't want any revenue officer snooping round. She didn't know what Art's death might open up.

Greg wrapped his ears in a silk handkerchief, pulled his hat low, buttoned his leather coat and examined his six-shooter.

"Nothing is ever going to seem the same to me after what I saw Mary go through to-day," he said huskily. "A man that could leave a woman to suffer like——"

"Like Clarissa Hackett did!" snapped the old lady.

"There was more than me had to do with her and you know it!" shouted Greg, furiously. "Even at that if I'd known—most men don't know. But after to-day—" His voice broke and he strode to the door.

TWO-BITS nickered and started on a trot down the trail, then snorted with impatience as Greg turned him eastward toward Young's ranch. Artie was not yet buried. The men of Ash Creek could not blast out a winter grave and at the same time act as a posse. There was a brilliant light in the cabin. Lucy's friends were sitting up with her. The dogs barked and a pack of coyotes answered from the alfalfa field beyond the stable. Greg knocked and entered. Half a dozen women were sitting round the kitchen stove with Lucy.

"Anybody seen Willy Archer?" demanded Greg, his handsome head thrown back, his eyes burning.

"Mary sick?" asked Lucy.

"Anybody seen Willy?" repeated Greg.

"He was here this morning. He said—" Lucy paused. "If Mary wants him— Did you want him for Mary, Greg?"

"Yes!" Greg's voice was grim. "I want him for Mary."

The widow rose and beckoned Greg into the only other room of the cabin which was dark and very silent.

"He's getting rid of the still and the raisin-jack," she whispered. "You won't inform on him if I tell you where to find him?"

"Inform on him? Do you suppose I care how much jack he's made?"

"Well, you go up Death Peak trail to where the three lone cedars is. Then you turn to the right and follow a coyote trail down into the little cañon. There's a cave in the mountain they've kind of fixed up there."

"All right, Lucy! Thanks! Let me out of this darkness, for God's sake!"

He followed her into the kitchen. "Can we help Mary?" asked one of the women.

"Aunty Ames is there," replied Greg as he slammed the door.

DEATH PEAK, except for its one clump of cedars, was entirely arid. In the summer its strange, barren orange ribs distinguished it from all the other mountains. Cattle never wandered there. Men avoided it; for it offered neither hunting nor range. The wind had swept the west slope clear of snow so there was no great delay in reaching the lone cedars. Greg left Two-bits here and followed the coyote trail down through the drifts to the south.

To any but a cowman of the mountains, the trip would have been hazardous in the extreme. The little cañon was in shadow, except where, far below, the moon shone on bottomless drifts. To the left was the wall of the mountain, icy and dim. The cold was intense. The silence, complete. Half an hour's careful descent and a dim light at the left shone through an old burlap curtain. Greg came to a full stop.

"You better get out of this country," he heard Willy say. "You ain't got everybody jaked to think you're a tramp trapper. And I ain't going to do any more gun-work for you either."

"Price wasn't high enough?" Greg recognized the tramp-trapper's voice.

"No, it ain't. And I can't keep suspicion all on Greg Alvord much longer. I'm through."

"Well, I guess we've finished the job, anyhow. Folks down at the post-office to-day seemed to realize finally that Mormons that talked sheep-raising hadn't any chance in this valley. Don't you worry about price. The bunch that's going to drive sheep-herding out of the cattle country can pay the price, and if you are caught they'll never let you hang. I'm through here but for one thing. Folks has got to get the idea of what Benton and Young was killed for. If you've got cold feet, I guess I can put it over with Greg Alvord."

"I don't care anything about you or your ideas. I'm through!" repeated Willy. "I did it because I was desperate for money to pay my debts. I got it and I'm going to clear out and start over."

"You didn't do it, I suppose," said the trapper, "because you'd been selling Alvord's slicks through me, and I had you, eh? Want me to get word to him that that maverick bull of his had prize-winning points and sold for two thousand dollars at Indian Arrow?"

Greg drew his gun and pushed through the curtain. The cave was dim, with a candle flickering on an up-ended barrel. The two men were hugging a small blaze in a crude fireplace. The uncertain light gave Willy gigantic proportions. The trapper looked pigmy beside him.

"Up with 'em!" said Greg. Then, as both pairs of hands shot upward, he said casually, "What did you put stones under their heads for, Willy?"

"So's they wouldn't bleed at the mouth. Always made me sick."

"You blank, blank fool!" shouted the trapper.

Willy looked startled; then a sickly white swept over his face.

"Willy," said Greg, "you tie your friend up so's he can't get away. Don't try any funny business. Toss yourn and his guns on the barrel first. That's right. Now truss him up good. I'll send for him later."

The trussing was done with vicious energy and the trapper was rolled close to the fire.

"Now, you march, Willy, not forgetting for a minute that my gun is located between your shoulder-blades."

WILLY marched, and the perilous journey to the three cedars was made with expedition. Here Greg would not permit Willy to procure his horse which he said was cached near by. He pulled Two-bits' reins over his arm and the five-mile tramp to Willy's ranch was begun. Once off Death Peak the going was heavy. The snow was deep and the horse trail hard to follow. It was dawn when the familiar cabin was sighted.

For the first time since leaving the cedars, Willy spoke. "Better take me on down to Newt's. Mary, she might——"

Greg interrupted. "What a kind man! I want you to see Mary just for a minute; then I'm going to hold a little private session over you myself."

Aunty Ames opened the door. "Now, boys, you ain't going to start any of your ructions round here!"

"No, we ain't. I'll ruction down at Newt's, Aunty," said Greg gruffly. "I want Willy to see Mary."

The old lady flung out of the way and the two men entered. Willy shuffled toward the bedroom and Aunty Ames turned back the sheet. Willy gasped as if he had been

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hit, stood for a long moment as if paralyzed, then burst into tears. Greg jerked him into the kitchen.

"Cut that!" he ordered. "A hound like you ain't got any right to tears. I come up yesterday and found my slick and I came in to get you and found her dying, alone. I did what I could. *I!* Do you get it? Stop crying, I tell you! Come on down to Newt's now! March!"

It was not a march by the time they reached Newt's place. It was a crawl, a lurching, cursing crawl, on feet that were icy clods. They could hear the baby crying as they reached the door-step. Newt jerked the door open. In one hand was a whisky-bottle full of milk, disporting a rubber nipple at the top.

"Willy wants to see his daughter before I settle him, Newt," panted Greg.

Newt jumped away from the door. The baby lay on the bed, screaming lustily. Willy stood shivering in the middle of the room.

Greg went on: "I just wanted you to see her, and because I know your kind heart I want to tell you not to worry. After I've lifted your head on a stone, she'll be my daughter."

"I thought some of keeping her myself, Greg," said Newt mildly. "I kind of like her, now I know her. She don't seem to squall except when she's hungry, and Aunty Ames has fixed up this life-saver. She's a right perifous little girl."

Willy continued to shiver, the tears running down his frosted cheeks. "A hell of a bad-man you are!" sneered Greg. "Newt, by his own confession this is the guy who killed Artie and Dick. So you see I got more than one right to kill him."

Newt held the bottle carefully to the baby's mouth. She gurgled, gulped and the screaming ceased. "I don't see why you want to shoot him. Let the law have its maligners. He'll suffer more."

"I can warp it to him worse than the law. Start for the corral where you shot Dick Benton, Willy," ordered Greg.

"Better have some breakfast first," suggested Newt hospitably. "Say, this baby's got blue eyes, like Mary's. Better let me keep her, Greg. She will be right dissocial with you when she's big enough to know you shot her daddy."

"Wait a minute, Willy," grunted Greg. He stood with his gun faithfully covering Willy while his eyes studied the little gurgling bundle on the bed. The alarm-clock on the table ticked off a full five minutes before he spoke.

"Newt, for a fool, you've got lots of sense. Willy, you go set down in that chair. Newt, you get my lariat and hog-tie and diamond hitch him and any other wild and fancy tie you know or have hard of. Then you feed us and beat it down to the post-office with the news. Stop on the way and send Mame Benton up to Aunty Ames."

When Newt and the postmaster and half a dozen others crowded into the cabin, two hours later, the baby was asleep on Greg's knee. His sunken eyes were bright and keen and the hand that supported the baby's back still held the six-shooter. He refused absolutely to give any details as to Mary's death, but retailed faithfully the story of his finding of Willy and the tramp trapper. When the posse had jingled off with Willy, Greg turned to Newt.

"I've got to go home and take care of my stock. You tell Aunty Ames to bring the baby's clothes up to my sheep wagon."

"Listen, Greg; you can't embroil a little baby round the world like that!"

"Like the devil I can't!" He rolled the child in a blanket, as carefully as a woman would have done it, and was gone.

ABOUT four o'clock that afternoon, Aunty Ames, indignation breathing from her nostrils, urged old Billy horse past the deserted Alvord corral, all blue velvet in the shadows thrown by the tumbling log sheds, past the clump of rose-tinted quivering aspens by the spring, along the lavender outcropping of John's Mountain, and came to pause before the sheep wagon.

"Greg Alvord!"

Greg jerked open the door. "Sh-sh-sh!"

"Sh-sh-sh my foot!" snorted Aunty Ames. "You hand that baby out and be quick about it!"

Greg eyed the old lady speculatively. Then he grinned. "Come in and have some dinner, Aunty. I know you haven't eaten a bite, by the time you've made getting over here."

"I'll come in and get that baby!" exclaimed Aunty Ames, throwing an emancipated leg over the pommel and sliding to the ground.

Greg gave her a hand into the sheep

wagon. It was cozy and shipshape. At the right, beside the door was the diminutive cook-stove, and between it and the right-hand wall, lockers and shelves. At the end of the wagon was the bunk. Wide seats ran along either side. Greg had let down the tiny swinging table above the left-hand seat and a dinner of fried potatoes and steak was steaming on it.

"Take off your coat, Aunty. 'Food before talk' is my motto."

Aunty Ames sniffed hungrily, and after peeping under the blanket at the sleeping child, she jerked off her mackinaw and sank on the seat by the table.

"Of all the fools, Greg! You are worse than Newt Jonas! You'll be beefing your own steers yet. Pour me some coffee. I'm too old for such doings."

"Did you bring the baby's clothes, Aunty?" asked Greg as he complied.

The old lady eyed Greg keenly. It was a lovable face in spite of its recently acquired hardness. It was a haggard face now and heavily lined, with the jaw even more aggressive than when Greg was searching for the maverick bull.

"Folks would talk scandalous if you tried to keep that child, Greg," she said in a more conciliatory tone.

"How can they?" he asked. "Mary was as good a girl as ever lived."

"I know it and so does everybody else. But a bachelor like you can't bring up a little girl."

"A bachelor like me can do most anything he sets his mind to! You can boss the job; but she's going to stay right in this sheep wagon with me till I get our old cabin rebuilt. I'll get Newt to come up and spell me, till I can go regularly to housekeeping. And I'll bet she'll be brought up like no girl round here ever was. I'll bet she won't be running the hills with these Ash Creek dogy riders while I'm living, or going to dances, either. And if I can live ten years more she'll be trained so she won't want to run with 'em after I'm dead!"

"Sounds good coming from a——"

Greg interrupted: "I know what I've been and I know what women are. That's why I'm going to give this little girl a real chance."

The old lady, her chin set obstinately, eyed the young man with curiosity. She poured herself a second cup of coffee.

"Greg, was you really in love with Mary Archer?" she asked.

"That's my business!" replied the man.

"What I'm trying to find out," she insisted, "is why you want to keep this baby."

"My God, didn't I birth the child?" shouted Greg.

"Laws, do I keep every child I birth?"

"Yes; but you are a woman and an old woman at that! Can't you see the difference?"

"No, I can't!" snapped Aunty Ames. "I'm going to take that baby home with me till I can locate somebody."

"Her mother hadn't a relative and Willy has only that old dad of his at Indian Arrow."

Greg set down his coffee-cup and stared long and angrily at Aunty Ames. "Listen," he began again; "I've been hard-boiled, haven't I? I'd done everything but kill before I went to France, and there—" suddenly he crossed to the bench beside the old lady and clasped her hands tensely in his. "Aunty, I saw sights in France that must either drive a guy crazy or boil him harder than ever. And it seems like ever since I came home I didn't know what to do with myself. But since yesterday I've known! I lived through five hours that were worse than all the days in Belleau Wood and I learned what women pay. I want to keep that little baby, Aunty, and kind of straighten things up."

The old lady's lips quivered, but her chin still was obstinate. Greg turned to the bed and lifted the baby out of her blankets and held her tenderly across his chest.

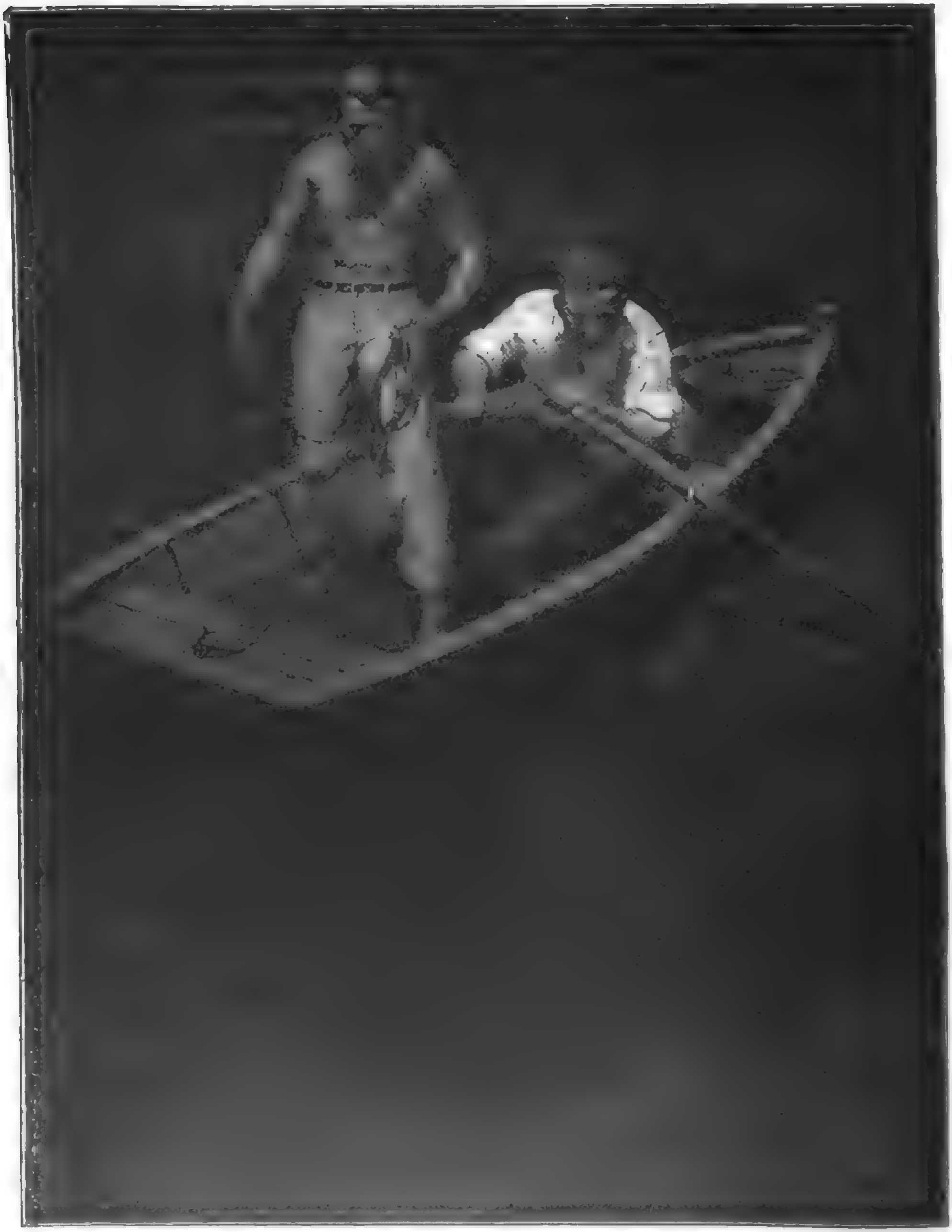
"Look! Do you think any one will love her better than me?"

THE old lady looked from the baby's new-born, blurred resemblance to Mary Archer, to Greg's haggard, pleading eyes. She cleared her throat and shook out her apron.

"You get paper and pencil," she said, "and set down what I tell you about taking care of her."

Greg kissed the baby and laid her on the bunk and then kissed Aunty Ames' work-scarred, trembling hand. After a silent moment the two set to work on an outline concerning the care and feeding of infants.

And so the search for the maverick ended.



Antony turned the boat's nose round until it pointed to the pine tree under which Bill had lain. "You see my tree and the other coat?" "Yes," said Bill. "Right! Now then, I'm going to row along this line until we're dead in between the two. Get it exact as you can—for your own sake." "Steady!" said Bill warningly. "Back a little—a little more—a little more—forward again. Right!" Antony left the oars on the water and looked round. As far as he could tell, they were in an exact line with each pair of landmarks. "Now then, Bill, in you go." Bill pulled off his shirt and stood up. "You mustn't dive from the boat, old boy," said Antony hastily. "You'll shift its position. Slide in gently."

The Red House Murder

The Unusual in Detective Fiction

Antony and Bill Pursue Their Investigations and Arrive at One Definite Conclusion

By A. A. Milne

Author of "Once On a Time," "Mr. Pim Passes By," etc.

Illustrations by George Giguère

IT WAS an unusual greeting that Antony Gillingham received when he called at the Red House, the country estate of Mark Ablett. In the hallway there was a man banging at a locked door and shouting: "Open the door! I say, open the door!" Seeing the newcomer, the man paused to explain. "I heard a shot," he said. "The door is locked. We must break it in."

Acting on Gillingham's suggestion that it was much easier to break in a window, he led the way at a run around to the back of the house, where, after breaking into the room through a window, they found the body of a man lying on the floor.

The man who had been banging on the door was Matthew Cayley, cousin and employee of Mark Ablett. He said that the dead man was Robert Ablett, a brother of Mark. Mark seemed to have disappeared without leaving a trace.

The killing had taken place while Mark was entertaining a house-party; the guests at the time were playing golf. At breakfast that morning Mark had announced that he expected a visit that afternoon—the first in fifteen years—from his brother Robert, who lived in Australia; he made it plain that the prospective visitor would be unwelcome. Among the house-party guests was Bill Beverley, a friend of Gillingham's; and it was in coming to see Bill that Antony found a mystery to solve. At the police investigation not much more was brought out than that soon after Robert had arrived loud talking, then shots, were heard in the "office," where the body was found; that a man had been killed and that a man was missing. To Antony there was much more in the case. For instance:

Why was the door to the room locked *after* Robert was killed?

Why did Cayley run all the way around the house to reach the office windows when there was a shorter way through the house?

Was it to give Mark time in which to escape?

The first thing Cayley had said in finding the body was: "Thank God! I was afraid it was Mark."

Why should he want to give Mark time to get away?

And why run if he did want to give him time?

Cayley's theory was that Mark had shot Robert accidentally and had been so frightened that he ran away. Antony believed this theory false and he believed that Cayley knew it to be false.

With this in mind, Antony proceeded to make investigations of his own. He felt that the police were not on the right track, that they were too much taken in by the obvious explanation of the tragedy and did not see the flaws in Cayley's explanation as he did. He found, for instance, evidence that proved to his entire satisfaction that Cayley had himself locked the door to the room where Robert Ablett had been shot. He also found that Cayley's motive in running around the house had been to open a window so that it might appear that whoever shot Robert had made his escape that way. He himself had been taken in by the open window and had proudly pointed it out as the murderer's path of escape. Only afterward, when he had carefully thought matters over, he remembered that Cayley had opened the window when his attention was engaged elsewhere.

THE police, encouraged by Cayley, were preparing to drag a small lake near the house. Was he eager to have it investigated because he knew that after it had once been proved that it held nothing, no one would look again, and he could safely hide something of importance there without fear of discovery?

These deductions and the fact that he had found a secret passage leading from the library to the bowling-green at some distance from the house convinced Antony that Cayley knew all about the killing, and that he was deliberately trying to throw the investigators off the scent.

Bill Beverley and Antony were working together when they found the secret passage. Entrance was made by pulling out a section of book-shelves. Antony decided to explore alone, leaving Bill outside on guard. He didn't know what he would find—possibly Mark was hiding there, possibly the thing that Cayley proposed to hide in the lake that night. The latter idea opened a train of thought that was almost too much for him. Cayley wouldn't be such a cold-blooded scoundrel as that.

While Bill mounted guard, Cayley suddenly appeared, and it was necessary for Bill to warn his friend by taps in Morse code. He was afraid Antony would not hear the warning and he did not know how to get rid of Cayley. But at last Cayley started out, Bill following. In the hall they met Antony.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Bill," said Antony.

With a tremendous effort Bill restrained his feelings and said casually enough that it was all right.

"Well, I must be off," said Cayley. "You're going down to the village?"

"That's the idea," said Bill.

"I wonder if you'd take this letter to Jallands' for me?"

"Of course."

"Thanks very much. Well, I shall see you later."

He nodded and got into the car.

As soon as they were alone, Bill turned eagerly to his friend.

"Well?" he said excitedly.

"Come into the library."

They went in, and Tony sank down into a chair.

"You must give me a moment," he said. "I've been running.

"Running?"

"Well, of course. How do you think I got back here?"

"You don't mean you went out at the other end?"

Antony nodded.

"Did you hear me tapping?"

"I did indeed, Bill; you're a genius."

Bill blushed.

"I knew you'd understand," he said. "You guessed that I meant Cayley?"

"I did. It was the least I could do after you had been so brilliant. You must have had rather an exciting time."

"Exciting? Good Lord, I should think I had!"

"Tell me about it."

As modestly as possible, Mr. Beverley explained his qualifications for a life on the stage.

"Good man!" said Antony at the end of it. "You are the most perfect double of Dr. Watson that ever lived. Bill, my lad," he went on dramatically, rising and taking Bill's hand in both of his, "there is nothing that you and I could not accomplish together, if we gave our minds to it."

"Silly old fool!"

"That's what you always say when I'm being serious. Well, anyway, thanks awfully. You really saved us this time."

"Were you coming back?"

"Yes. At least, I think I was. I was just wondering when I heard your tapping. The fact of the door being shut was rather surprising. Of course the whole idea was to see if it could be opened easily from the other side, but I felt somehow that you wouldn't shut it until the last possible moment—until you saw me coming back. Well, then I heard the taps, and I knew it must mean something, so I sat tight. Then when 'C' began to come along I said, 'Cayley, b'Jove'—bright, am I not?—and I simply ran to the other end of the passage for all I was worth. And ran back again. Because I thought you might be getting rather involved in explanations about where I was and so on."

"You didn't see Mark, then?"

"No. Nor his— No; I didn't see anything."

"Nor what?"

Antony was silent for a moment.

"I didn't see anything, Bill. Or, rather, I did see something; I saw a door in the wall, a cupboard. And it's locked. So if there's anything we want to find, that's where it is."

"Could Mark be hiding there?"

"I called through the keyhole, in a whisper, 'Mark, are you there?'—he would have thought it was Cayley. There was no answer."

"Well, let's go down and try again. We might be able to get the door open."

Antony shook his head.

"Am I not going at all?" said Bill, in great disappointment.

When Antony spoke it was to ask another question.

"Can Cayley drive a car?"

"Yes, of course. Why?"

"Then he might easily drop the chauffeur at his lodge and go off to Stanton, or wherever he wanted to, on his own?"

"I suppose so—if he wanted to."

"Yes." Antony got up. "Well, look here; as we said we were going into the village, and as we promised to leave that letter, I almost think we'd better do it."

"Oh! Oh, very well."

"Jallands'. What were you telling me about that? Oh, yes; the widow Norbury."

"That's right. Cayley used to be rather keen on the daughter. The letter's for her."

"Yes; well, let's take it. Just to be on the safe side."

"Am I going to be done out of that secret passage altogether?" asked Bill fretfully.

"There's nothing to see, really, I promise you."

"You're very mysterious. What's upset you? You did see something down there; I'm certain of it."

"I did, and I've told you about it."

"No, you haven't. You only told me about the door in the wall."

"That's it, Bill. And it's locked. And I'm frightened of what's behind it."

"But, then, we shall never know what's there if we aren't going to look.

"We shall know to-night," said Antony, taking Bill's arm and leading him to the hall, "when we watch our dear friend Cayley dropping it into the pond."

THEY left the road and took the path across the fields which sloped gently downward towards Jallands'. Antony was silent, and since it is difficult to keep up a conversation with a silent man for any length of time, Bill had dropped into silence too. Or rather, he hummed to himself, hit at thistles in the grass with his stick and made uncomfortable noises with his pipe. But he noticed that his companion kept looking back over his shoulder, almost as if he wanted to remember for a future occasion the way by which they were coming. Yet there was no difficulty about it, for they remained all the time in view of the road, and the belt of trees above the long park wall which bordered its farther side stood out clearly against the sky.

Antony, who had just looked round again, turned back with a smile.

"What's the joke?" said Bill, glad of the more social atmosphere.

"Cayley. Didn't you see?"

"See what?"

"The car. Going past on the road there."

"So that's what you were looking for. You've got good eyes, my boy, if you recognize the car at this distance after only seeing it twice."

"Well, I have got good eyes."

"I thought he was going to Stanton."

"He hoped you'd think so—obviously."

"Then where is he going?"

"The library, probably. To consult our friend Ussher—after making quite sure that his friends Beverley and Gillingham really were going to Jallands', as they said. We must be devilishly inconvenient for him, hanging about the house. Any moment he can get, when we're definitely somewhere else, must be very useful to him."

"Useful for what?"

"Well, useful for his nerves, if for nothing else. We know he's mixed up in this business; we know he's hiding a secret or two. Even if he doesn't suspect that we're on his tracks, he must feel that any moment we might stumble on something."

Bill gave a grunt of assent, and they went slowly on again.

"What about to-night?" he said, after a lengthy blow at his pipe.

"Try a piece of grass," said Antony, offering it to him.

Bill pushed it through the mouthpiece, drew again, said, "That's better," and returned the pipe to his pocket.

"How are we going to get out without Cayley knowing?"

"Well, that wants thinking over. It's going to be difficult. I wish we were sleeping at the inn. Is this Miss Norbury, by any chance?"

Bill looked up quickly. They were close to Jallands' now, an old thatched farmhouse which, after centuries of sleep, had awakened to a new world, and had forthwith sprouted wings; wings, however, of so discreet a growth that they had not brought with them any obvious change of character, and Jallands', even with a bathroom, was still Jallands'. To the outward view, at any rate. Inside, it was more clearly Mrs. Norbury's.

"Yes—Angela Norbury," murmured Bill. "Not bad-looking, is she?"

THE girl who stood by the little white gate of Jallands' was something more than "not bad-looking," but in this matter Bill was keeping his superlatives for another. In Bill's eyes she must be judged, and condemned, by all that distinguished her from Betty Calladine. To Antony, unhampered by these standards of comparison, she seemed quite simply beautiful.

"Cayley asked us to bring a letter along," explained Bill, when the necessary handshakings and introductions were over. "Here you are."

"You will tell him, won't you, how dreadfully sorry I am about—about what has happened? It seems so hopeless to say anything—so hopeless even to believe it. If it is true what we've heard."

Bill repeated the outline of the events of yesterday.

"Yes. And Mr. Ablett hasn't been found yet?"

"No."

She shook her head in distress. "It still seems to have happened to somebody else, somebody we didn't know at all." Then, with a sudden grave smile which included both of them, "But you must come and have some tea."

"It's awfully decent of you," said Bill awkwardly, "but we—er——"

"You will, won't you?" she said to Antony.

"Thank you very much."

Mrs. Norbury was delighted to see them, as she always was to see any men in her house who came up to the necessary standard of eligibility. When her life-work was completed, and summed-up in those beautiful words: "A marriage has been arranged, and will shortly take place, between Angela, daughter of the late John Norbury—" then she would utter a grateful "*Nunc dimittis*," and depart in peace—to a better world, if Heaven insisted, but preferably to her new son-in-law's more dignified establishment. For there was no doubt that eligibility meant not alone eligibility as a husband.

But it was not as "eligibles" that the visitors from the Red House were received with such eagerness to-day, and even if her special smile for "possibles" was there, it was instinctive rather than reasoned. All that she wanted at this moment was news—news of Mark. For she was bringing it off at last; and if the engagement columns of the *Morning Post* were preceded, as in the case of its obituary columns, by a premonitory bulletin, the announcement of yesterday would have cried triumphantly to the world, or to such part of the world as mattered: "A marriage has (very nearly) been arranged (by Mrs. Norbury), and will certainly take place, between Angela, only daughter of the late John Norbury, and Mark Ablett, of the Red House." And, coming across it on his way to the sporting-page, Bill would have been surprised. For he had thought that, if anybody, it was Cayley.

To the girl it was neither. She was often amused by her mother's ways; sometimes ashamed of them; sometimes distressed by them. The Mark Ablett affair had seemed to her particularly distressing, for Mark was so obviously in league with her mother against her. Other suitors upon whom her mother had smiled had been embarrassed by that championship; Mark appeared to depend on it as much as on his own attractions, great though he thought these to be. They went a-wooing together. It was a pleasure to turn to Cayley, that hopeless ineligible.

But alas! Cayley had misunderstood her. She could not imagine Cayley in love—until she saw it, and tried, too late, to stop it. That was four days ago. She had not seen him since, and now here was this letter. She dreaded opening it. It was a relief to feel that at least she had an excuse for not doing so while her guests were in the house.

MRS. NORBURY recognized at once that Antony was likely to be the more sympathetic listener; and when tea was over and Bill and Angela had been dispatched to the garden with the promptness and efficiency of the expert, dear Mr. Gillingham found himself on the sofa beside her, listening to many things which were of even greater interest to him than she could possibly have hoped.

"It is terrible, terrible!" she said. "And to suggest that dear Mr. Ablett——"

Antony made suitable noises.

"You've seen Mr. Ablett for yourself. A kinder, more warm-hearted man——"

Antony explained that he had not seen Mr. Ablett.

"Of course, yes. I was forgetting. But believe me, Mr. Gillingham, you can trust a woman's intuition in these matters."

Antony said that he was sure of this.

"Think of my feelings as a mother."

Antony was thinking of Miss Norbury's feelings as a daughter and wondering if she guessed that her affairs were now being discussed with a stranger. Yet what could he do? What, indeed, did he want to do except listen, in the hope of learning? Mark engaged, or about to be engaged! Had that any bearing on the events of yesterday? What, for instance, would Mrs. Norbury have thought of Brother Robert, that family skeleton? Was this another reason for wanting Brother Robert out of the way?

"I never liked him, never!"

"Never liked—" said Antony, bewildered.

"That cousin of his—Mr. Cayley."

"Oh!"

"I ask you, Mr. Gillingham, am I the sort of woman to trust my little girl to a man who would go about shooting his only brother?"

"I'm sure you wouldn't, Mrs. Norbury."

"If there has been any shooting done, it has been done by somebody else."

Antony looked at her inquiringly.

"I never liked him," said Mrs. Norbury firmly. "Never."

However, thought Antony to himself, that didn't quite prove that Cayley was a murderer.

"How did Miss Norbury get on with him?" he asked cautiously.

"There was nothing in that at all," said Miss Norbury's mother emphatically. "*Nothing*. I would say so to anybody."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I never meant——"

"Nothing. I can say that for dear Angela with perfect confidence. Whether *he* made advances—" She broke off with a shrug of her plump shoulders.

Antony waited eagerly.

"Naturally, they met. Possibly he might have—I don't know. But my duty as a mother was clear, Mr. Gillingham."

Mr. Gillingham made an encouraging noise.

"I told him quite frankly that—how shall I put it?—that he was trespassing. Tactfully, of course. But frankly."

"You mean," said Antony, trying to speak calmly, "that you told him that—er—Mr. Ablett and your daughter——"

Mrs. Norbury nodded several times.

"Exactly, Mr. Gillingham. I had my duty as a mother."

"I am sure, Mrs. Norbury, that nothing would keep you from doing your duty. But it must have been disagreeable. Particularly if you weren't quite sure——"

"He was attracted, Mr. Gillingham. Obviously attracted."

"Who would not be?" said Antony, with a charming smile. "It must have been something of a shock to him to——"

"It was just that which made me so glad that I had spoken. I saw at once that I had not spoken a moment too soon."

"There must have been a certain awkwardness about the next meeting," suggested Antony.

"Naturally, he has not been here since. No doubt they would have been bound to meet up at the Red House sooner or later."

"Oh, this was only quite lately?"

"Last week, Mr. Gillingham. I spoke just in time."

"Ah!" said Antony, under his breath. He had been waiting for it.

He would have liked now to have gone away, so that he might have thought over the new situation by himself; or perhaps preferably to have changed partners for a little while with Bill. Miss Norbury would hardly be ready to confide in a stranger with the readiness of her mother, but he might have learned something by listening to her. For which of them had she the greater feeling—Cayley or Mark? Was she really prepared to marry Mark? Did she love him—or the other—or neither? Mrs. Norbury was only a trustworthy witness in regard to her own actions and thoughts; he had learned all that was necessary of those, and only the daughter now had anything left to tell him. But Mrs. Norbury was still talking.

"Girls are so foolish, Mr. Gillingham," she was saying. "It is fortunate that they have mothers to guide them. It was so obvious to me from the beginning that dear Mr. Ablett was just the husband for my little girl. You never knew him?"

Antony said again that he had not seen Mr. Ablett.

"Such a gentleman. So nice-looking in his artistic way. A regular Velasquez—I should say Vandyck. Angela would have it that she could never marry a man with a beard. As if that mattered, when—" She broke off, and Antony finished her sentence for her.

"The Red House is certainly charming," he said.

"Charming. Quite charming. And it is not as if Mr. Ablett's appearance were in any way undistinguished. Quite the contrary. I'm sure you agree with me?"

Antony said that he had never had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Ablett.

"Yes. And quite the center of the literary and artistic world. So desirable in every way."

She gave a deep sigh, and communed with herself for a little. Antony was about to snatch the opportunity of leaving when Mrs. Norbury began again.

"And then there's this scapegrace brother of his. He was perfectly frank with me, Mr. Gillingham. He would be. He told me of this brother, and I told him that I was quite certain it would make no difference to my daughter's feelings for him. After all, the brother was in Australia."

"When was this? Yesterday?" Antony felt that, if Mark had only mentioned it after his brother's announcement of a personal call at the Red House, this perfect frankness had a good deal of wisdom behind it.

"It couldn't have been yesterday, Mr. Gillingham. Yesterday—" She shuddered and shook her head.

"I thought perhaps he had been down here in the morning."

"Oh, no! There is such a thing, Mr. Gillingham, as being too devoted a lover. Not in the morning; no. We both agreed that dear Angela— Oh, no! No; the day before yesterday, when he happened to drop in about tea-time."

It occurred to Antony that Mrs. Norbury had come a long way from her opening statement that Mark and Miss Norbury were practically engaged. She was now admitting that dear Angela was not to be rushed, that dear Angela had, indeed, no heart for the match at all.

"The day before yesterday. As it happened, dear Angela was out. Not that it mattered. He was driving to Middleston. He hardly had time for a cup of tea; so that even if she had been in——"

Antony nodded absently. This was something new. Why did Mark go to Middleston the day before yesterday? But, after all, why shouldn't he? A hundred reasons unconnected with the death of Robert might have taken him there.

He got up to go. He wanted to be alone—alone, at least, with Bill. Mrs. Norbury had given him many things to think over, but the great outstanding fact which had emerged was this: that Cayley had reason to hate Mark. Mrs. Norbury had given him that reason. To hate? Well, to be jealous, anyhow. But that was enough.

"YOU see," he said to Bill, as they walked back, "we know that Cayley is perjuring himself and risking himself over this business, and that must be for one of two reasons. Either to save Mark or to endanger him. That is to say, he is either whole-heartedly for him or whole-heartedly against him. Well, now we know that he is against him, definitely against him."

"But I say, you know," protested Bill, "one doesn't necessarily try to ruin one's rival in love."

"Doesn't one?" said Antony, turning to him with a smile.

Bill blushed.

"Well, of course, one never knows, but I mean——"

"You mightn't try to ruin him, Bill, but you wouldn't perjure yourself in order to get him out of a trouble of his own making.

"Lord, no!"

"So that of the two alternatives the other is the more likely."

They had come to the gate in the last field which divided them from the road, and having gone through it, they turned round and leaned against it, resting for a moment, and looking down at the house which they had left.

"Nice little place, isn't it?" said Bill.

"Very. But rather mysterious."

"In what way?"

"Well, where's the front door?"

"The front door? Why, you've just come out of it."

"But isn't there a drive, or a road or anything?"

Bill laughed.

"No; that's the beauty of it to some people. And that's why it's so cheap, and why the Norburys can afford it, I expect." They're not too well off."

"But what about luggage and tradesmen and that kind of thing?"

"Oh, there's a car-track, but motor-cars can't come any nearer than the road"—he turned round and pointed—"up there. So the week-end millionaire people don't take it. At least, they'd have to build a road and a garage and all the rest of it if they did."

"I see," said Antony carelessly, and they turned round and continued their walk up to the road. But later on he remembered this casual conversation at the gate, and saw the importance of it.

WHAT was it that Cayley was going to hide in the pond that night? Antony thought that he knew now. It was Mark's body.

From the beginning he had seen this answer coming, and had drawn back from it. For, if Mark had been killed, it seemed such a cold-blooded killing. Was Cayley equal to it? Bill would have said "No," but that was because he had had breakfast with Cayley, and lunch with him, and dinner with him; had ragged him and played games with him. Bill would have said "No," because Bill wouldn't have killed anybody in cold blood himself, and because he took it for granted that other people behaved pretty much as he did. But Antony had no such illusions. Murders were done; murder had actually been done here, for there was Robert's dead body. Why not another murder?

Had Mark been in the office at all that afternoon? The only evidence (other than Cayley's, which obviously did not count) was Elsie's. Elsie was quite certain that she had heard his voice. But, then, Bill had said that it was a very characteristic voice—an easy voice, therefore, to imitate. If Bill could imitate it so successfully, why not Cayley?

But perhaps it had not been such a cold-blooded killing after all. Suppose Cayley had a quarrel with his cousin that afternoon over the girl whom they were both wooing. Suppose Cayley had killed Mark, either purposely, in sudden passion, or accidentally, meaning only to knock him down. Suppose that this had happened in the passage, say about two o'clock, either because Cayley had deliberately led him there or because Mark had casually suggested a visit to it. (One could imagine Mark continually gloating over that secret passage.) Suppose Cayley, there, with the body at his feet, feeling already the rope round his neck, his mind darting this way and that in frantic search for a way of escape; and suppose that suddenly and irrelevantly he remembers that Robert is coming to the house at three o'clock that afternoon—automatically he looks at his watch—in half an hour's time!

In half an hour's time! He must think of something quickly, quickly. Shall he bury the body in the passage and let it be thought that Mark ran away, frightened at the mere thought of his brother's arrival? But there was the evidence of the breakfast-table. Mark had seemed annoyed at this resurrection of the black sheep, but certainly not frightened. No; that was much too thin a story. But suppose Mark had actually seen his brother and had a quarrel with him; suppose it could be made to look as if Robert had killed Mark——

Antony pictured to himself Cayley in the passage, standing over the dead body of his cousin, and working it out. How could Robert be made to seem the murderer, if Robert were alive to deny it? But suppose Robert were dead, too.

He looks at his watch again. (Only twenty-five minutes now.) Suppose Robert were dead, too. Robert dead in the office, and Mark dead in the passage—how does that help? Madness! But if the bodies were brought together somehow—and Robert's death looked like suicide? Was it possible?

Madness again. Too difficult. (Only twenty minutes now.) Too difficult to arrange in twenty minutes. Can't arrange a suicide. Too difficult. Only nineteen minutes——

AND then the sudden inspiration! Robert dead in the office, Mark's body hidden in the passage—impossible to make Robert seem the murderer, but how easy to make Mark! Robert dead and Mark missing; why, it jumped to the eye at once. Mark had killed Robert—accidentally; yes, that would be more likely—and then had run away. Sudden panic. (He looks at his watch again. Fifteen minutes, but plenty of time now. The thing arranges itself.)

Was that the solution, Antony wondered. It seemed to fit in with the facts as they knew them; but, then, so did that other theory which he had suggested to Bill in the morning.

"Which one?" said Bill.

They had come back from Jallands' through the park and were sitting in the copse above the pond, from which the inspector and his fishermen had now withdrawn. Bill had listened with open mouth to Antony's theory, and save for an occasional "By Jove!" had listened in silence. "Smart man, Cayley," had been his only comment at the end.

"Which other theory?"

"That Mark had killed Robert accidentally and had gone to Cayley for help, and that, Cayley, having hidden him in the passage, locked the office door from the outside and hammered on it.

"Yes; but you were so dashed mysterious about that. I asked you what the point of it was, and you wouldn't say anything." He thought for a little and then went on, "I suppose you meant that Cayley deliberately betrayed Mark and tried to make him look like a murderer?"

"I wanted to warn you that we should probably find Mark in the passage, alive or dead."

"And now you don't think so?"

"Now I think that his dead body is there."

"Meaning that Cayley went down and killed him afterward—after you had come, after the police had come?"

"Well, that's what I shrink from, Bill. It's so horribly cold-blooded. Cayley may be capable of it, but I hate to think of it."

"But, come to think of it, your other way is cold-blooded enough. According to you, he goes up to the office and deliberately shoots a man with whom he has no quarrel, whom he hasn't seen for fifteen years!"

"Yes; but to save his own neck. That makes a difference. My theory is that he quarreled violently with Mark over the girl, and killed him in sudden passion. Anything that happened after that would be self-defense. I don't mean that I excuse it, but that I understand it. And I think that Mark's dead body is in the passage now, and has been there since, say, half-past two yesterday afternoon. And to-night Cayley is going to hide it in the pond."

Bill pulled at the moss on the ground beside him, threw away a handful or two, and said slowly, "You may be right, but it's all guess-work, you know."

Antony laughed.

"Good Lord, of course it is!" he said. "And to-night we shall know if it's a good guess or a bad one."

Bill brightened up suddenly.

"To-night," he said. "I say, to-night's going to be rather fun. How do we work it?"

Antony was silent for a little.

"Of course," he said at last, "we ought to inform the police, so that they can come here and watch the pond to-night."

"Of course," grinned Bill.

"But I think that perhaps it is a little early to put our theories before them."

"I think perhaps it is," said Bill solemnly.

Antony looked up at him with a sudden smile.

"Bill, you old bounder!"

"Well, darn it, it's *our* show. I don't see why we shouldn't get our little bit of fun out of it."

"Neither do I. All right, then, we'll do without the police to-night."

"We shall miss them," said Bill sadly; "but 'tis better so."

THERE were two problems in front of them: first, the problem of getting out of the house without being discovered by Cayley, and, second, the problem of recovering whatever it was that Cayley dropped into the pond that night.

"Let's look at it from Cayley's point of view," said Antony. "He may not know that we're on his track, but he can't help being suspicious of us. He's bound to be suspicious of everybody in the house, and more particularly of us, because we're presumably more intelligent than the others."

He stopped for a moment to light his pipe, and Bill took the opportunity of looking more intelligent than Mrs. Stevens.

"Now, he has got something to hide to-night, and he's going to take good care that we aren't watching him. Well, what will he do?"

"See that we are asleep first, before he starts out."

"Yes. Come and tuck us up, and see that we're nice and comfortable."

"Yes; that's awkward," said Bill. "But we could lock our doors, and then he wouldn't know that we weren't there."

"Have you ever locked your door?"

"Never."

"No. And you can bet that Cayley knows that. Anyway, he'd bang on it, and you wouldn't answer, and then what would he think?"

Bill was silent, crushed.

"Then I don't see how we're going to do it," he said, after deep thought. "He'll obviously come to us just before he starts out, and that doesn't give us time to get to the pond in front of him."

"Let's put ourselves in his place," said Antony, puffing slowly at his pipe. "He's got the body, or whatever it is, in the passage. He won't come up the stairs, carrying it in his arms, and look in at our doors to see if we're awake. He'll have to make sure about us first, and then go down for the body afterward. So that gives us a little time."

"Y-yes," said Bill doubtfully. "We might just do it, but it'll be a bit of a rush."

"But wait. When he's gone down to the passage and got the body, what will he do next?"

"Come out again," said Bill helpfully.

"Yes; but which end?"

Bill sat up with a start.

"By George, you mean that he will go out of the far end by the bowling-green?"

"Don't you think so? Just imagine him walking across the lawn in full view of the house, at midnight, with a body in his arms. Think of the awful feeling he would have in the back of the neck, wondering if anybody, any restless sleeper, had chosen just that moment to wander to the window and look out into the night. There's still plenty of moonlight, Bill. Is he going to walk across the park in the moonlight, with all those windows staring at him? Not if he can help it. Not when he can get out by the bowling-green, and then come to the pond without ever being in sight of the house at all."

"You're right, Tony. And that will just about give us time. Good! Now, what's the next thing?"

"The next thing is to mark the exact place in the pond where he drops—whatever he drops."

"So that we can fish it out again."

"If we can see what it is, we shan't want to. The police can have a go at it to-morrow. But if it's something we can't identify from a distance, then we must try to get it out. To see whether it's worth telling the police about."

"Y-yes," said Bill, wrinkling his forehead. "Of course, the trouble with water is that one bit of it looks pretty much like the next bit. I don't know if that had occurred to you."

"It had," smiled Antony. "Let's come and have a look at it."

They walked to the edge of the copse, and lay down there in silence, looking at the pond beneath them.

"See anything?" said Antony at last.

"What?"

"The fence on the other side."

"What about it?"

"Well, it's rather useful, that's all. You can take a bearing on it. You see——"

"Yes; you needn't stop to explain to me what a bearing is."

"I wasn't going to. But you're lying here"—he looked up—"underneath this pine tree. Cayley comes out in the old boat and drops his parcel in. You take a line from here on to the boat, and mark it off on the fence there. Say it's the fifth post from the end. Well, then I take a line from *my* tree—we'll find one for me directly—and it comes on to the twentieth post, say. And where the two lines meet, there shall the eagles be gathered together. Q. E. D. And there, I almost forgot to remark, will the taller eagle, Beverley by name, do his famous diving act."

Bill looked at him uneasily.

"Really? It's rotten dirty water, you know."

"I'm afraid so, Bill. So it is written in the book of Jasher."

"Of course I knew that one of us would have to, but I hoped— Oh, well, it's a warm night."

"Just the night for a bath," agreed Antony, getting up. "Well now, let's have a look for my tree."

They walked down to the margin of the pond and then looked back. Bill's tree stood up and took the evening, tall and unmistakable, fifty feet nearer to heaven than its neighbors. But it had its fellow at the other end of the copse, not quite so tall, perhaps, but equally conspicuous.

"That's where I shall be," said Antony, pointing to it. "Now, for the Lord's sake, count your posts accurately."

"Thanks very much, but I shall do it for my own sake," said Bill, with feeling. "I don't want to spend the whole night diving."

"Fix on the post in a straight line with you and the splash, and then count backward to the beginning of the fence."

"Right, old boy! Leave it to me. I can do this on my head."

"Well, that's how you'll have to do the last part of it," said Antony with a smile.

He looked at his watch. It was nearly time to change for dinner. They started to walk back to the house together.

"There's one thing which worries me," said Antony. "Where does Cayley sleep?"

"Next door to me. Why?"

"Well, it's just possible that he might have another look at you after he's come back from the pond. I don't think he'd bother about it in the ordinary way, but if he is actually passing your door, I think he might glance in."

"I shan't be there. I shall be at the bottom of the pond, sucking up mud."

"Yes. Do you think you could leave something in your bed that looked vaguely like you in the dark? A bolster with a pajama coat round it, and one arm outside the blanket, and a pair of socks or something for the head. You know the kind of thing. I think it would please him to feel that you were still sleeping peacefully."

Bill chuckled to himself.

"You bet! I'm awfully good at that. I'll make him up something really good. But what about you?"

"I'm at the other end of the house; he's hardly likely to bother about me a second time. And I shall be so very fast asleep at his first visit. Still, I may as well—to be on the safe side."

THEY went into the house. Cayley was in the hall as they came in. He nodded and took out his watch.

"Time to change?" he said.

"Just about," said Bill.

"You didn't forget my letter?"

"I did not. In fact, we had tea there."

"Ah!" He looked away and said carelessly, "How were they all?"

"They sent all sorts of sympathetic messages to you, and—and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, yes."

Bill waited for him to say something more, and then, as nothing more was coming, he turned round, said, "Come on, Tony," and led the way up-stairs.

"Got all you want?" he said at the top of the stairs.

"I think so. Come and see me before you go down."

Antony shut his bedroom door behind him and walked over to the window. He pushed open a casement and looked out. His bedroom was just over the door at the back of the house. The side wall of the office, which projected out into the lawn beyond the rest of the house, was on his left. He could step out on to the top of the door, and from there drop easily to the ground. Getting back would be a little more difficult. There was a convenient water-pipe which would help.

He had just finished his dressing when Bill came in.

"Final instructions?" he asked, sitting down on the bed. "By the way, how are we amusing ourselves after dinner? I mean immediately after dinner."

"Billiards?" suggested Antony.

"All right. Anything you like."

"Don't talk too loud," said Antony in a lower voice. "We're more or less over the hall, and Cayley may be there." He led the way to the window. "We'll go out this way to-night. Going down-stairs is too risky. It's easy enough; better put on tennis-shoes."

"Right. I say, in case I don't get another chance alone with you—what do I do when Cayley comes to tuck me up?"

"It's difficult to say. Be as natural as you can. I mean, if he just knocks lightly and looks in, be asleep. Don't overdo the snoring. But if he makes a noise, you'll have to wake up and rub your eyes, and wonder what on earth he's doing in your room at all. You know the sort of thing."

"Right. And about the dummy figure. I'll make it up directly we come up-stairs, and hide it under the bed."

"Yes. I think we'd better go completely to bed ourselves. We shan't take a moment dressing again, and it will give him time to get safely into the passage. Then come into my room."

"Right. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

They went down-stairs together.

CAYLEY seemed very fond of them that night. After dinner was over, he suggested a stroll outside. They walked up and down the gravel in front of the house, saying very little to each other, until Bill could stand it no longer. For the last twenty turns he had been slowing down hopefully each time they came to the door, but the hint had always been lost on his companions, and each time another turn had been taken. But in the end he had been firm.

"What about a little billiards?" he said, shaking himself free from the others.

"Will you play?" said Antony to Cayley.

"I'll watch you," he said, and he had watched them resolutely until the game, and then another game after that, had been played.

They went into the hall and attacked the drinks.

"Well, thank Heaven for bed," said Bill, putting down his glass. "Are you coming?"

"Yes," said Antony, and finished his drink. He looked at Cayley.

"I've just got one or two little things to do," said Cayley. "I shan't be long following you."

"Well, good-night, then."

"Good-night."

"Good-night," called Bill from half-way up the stairs. "Good-night, Tony."

"Good-night."

Bill looked at his watch. Half-past eleven. Not much chance of anything happening for another hour. He pulled open a drawer and wondered what to wear on their expedition. Gray-flannel trousers, flannel shirt, and a dark coat; perhaps a sweater, as they might be lying out in the copse for some time. And—good idea—a towel. He would want it later on, and meanwhile he could wear it round his waist. Tennis-shoes. There! Everything was ready. Now then for the dummy figure.

He looked at his watch again before getting into bed. Twelve-fifteen. How long to wait before Cayley came up? He turned out the light, and then, standing by the door in his pajamas, waited for his eyes to become accustomed to the new darkness. He could only just make out the bed in the corner of the room. Cayley would want more light than that if he were to satisfy himself from the door that the bed was occupied. He pulled the curtains a little way back. That was about right. He could have another look later on, when he had the dummy figure in the bed.

How long would it be before Cayley came up? It wasn't that he wanted his friends, Beverley and Gillingham, to be asleep before he started on his business at the pond; all that he wanted was to be sure that they were safely in their bedrooms. Cayley's business would make no noise, give no sign to attract the most wakeful member of the household, so long as the household was really inside the house. But if he wished to reassure himself about his guests, he would have to wait until they were far enough on their way to sleep not to be disturbed by him as he came up to reassure himself. So it amounted to the same thing, really. He would wait until they were asleep—until they were asleep—asleep.

With a great effort, Bill regained the mastery over his wandering thoughts and came awake again. This would never do. It would be fatal if he went to sleep—if he went to sleep—to sleep. And then in an instant he was intensely awake. Suppose Cayley never came at all.

Suppose Cayley was so unsuspicious that, as soon as they had gone up-stairs, he had dived down into the passage and set about his business. Suppose, even now, he was at the pond, dropping into it that secret of his. Good heavens, what fools they had been! How could Antony have taken such a risk? Put yourself in Cayley's place, he had said. But how was it possible? They weren't Cayley. Cayley was at the pond now. They would never know what he had dropped into it.

Listen! Somebody at the door. He was asleep. Quite naturally now. Breathe a little more loudly, perhaps. He was asleep. The door was opening. He could feel it opening behind him. Good Lord, suppose Cayley really *was* a murderer! Why, even now he might be—no; he mustn't think of that. If he thought of that, he would have to turn round. He mustn't turn round. He was asleep—just peacefully asleep. But why didn't the door shut? Where was Cayley now? Just behind him? And in his hand—no; he mustn't think of that. He was asleep. But why didn't the door shut?

The door was shutting. There was a sigh from the sleeper in the bed, a sigh of relief which escaped him involuntarily. But it had a very natural sound—a deep breath from a heavy sleeper. He added another one to it to make it seem more natural. The door was shut.

Bill counted a hundred slowly and then got up. As quickly and as noiselessly as possible he dressed himself in the dark. He put the dummy figure in the bed, arranged the clothes so that just enough but not too much of it was showing, and stood by the door looking at it. For a casual glance the room was just about light enough. Then very quietly, very slowly, he opened the door. All was still. There was no light from beneath the door of Cayley's room. Very quietly, very carefully he crept along the passage to Antony's room. He opened the door and went in.

Antony was still in bed. Bill walked across to wake him up, and then stopped rigid, and his heart thumped against his ribs. There was somebody else in the room.

"All right, Bill," said a whispering voice, and Antony stepped out from the curtains.

Bill gazed at him without saying anything.

"Rather good, isn't it?" said Antony, coming closer and pointing to the bed. "Come on; the sooner we get out now the better."

He led the way out of the window, the silent Bill following him. They reached the ground safely and noiselessly, went quickly across the lawn, and so, over the fence, into the park. It was not until they were out of sight of the house that Bill felt it safe to speak.

"I quite thought it was you in bed," he said.

"I hoped you would. I shall be rather disappointed now if Cayley doesn't call again. It's a pity to waste it."

"He came all right just now?"

"Oh, yes. What about you?"

Bill explained his feelings picturesquely.

"There wouldn't have been much point in his killing you," said Antony prosaically. "Besides being too risky."

"Oh!" said Bill. And then, "I *had* rather hoped that it was his love for me which restrained him."

Antony laughed.

"I doubt it. You didn't turn up your light when you dressed?"

"Good Lord, no! Did you want me to?"

Antony laughed again and took him by the arm.

"You're a splendid conspirator, Bill. You and I could take on anything together."

THE pond was waiting for them, more solemn in the moonlight. The trees which crowned the sloping bank on the far side of it were mysteriously silent. It seemed that they had the world very much to themselves.

Almost unconsciously, Antony spoke in a whisper.

"There's your tree; there's mine. As long as you don't move, there's no chance of his seeing you. After he's gone, don't come out till I do. He won't be here for a quarter of an hour or so; so don't be impatient."

"All right," whispered Bill.

Antony gave him a nod and a smile, and they walked off to their posts.

The minutes went by slowly. To Antony, lying hidden in the undergrowth at the foot of his tree, a new problem was presenting itself. Suppose Cayley had to make more than one journey that night? He might come back to find them in the boat; one of them, indeed, in the water. And if they decided to wait in hiding, on the chance of Cayley coming back again, what was the least time they could safely allow? Perhaps it would be better to go round to the front of the house and watch for his return there, the light in his bedroom, before conducting their experiments at the pond. But then they might miss his second visit in this way, if he made a second visit. It was difficult.

His eyes were fixed on the boat as he considered these things, and suddenly, as if materialized from nowhere, Cayley was standing by the boat. In his hand was a small brown bag.

Cayley put the bag in the bottom of the boat, stepped in, and using an oar as a punt-pole, pushed slowly off. Then very silently he rowed toward the other end of the pond.

He had stopped. The oars rested on the water. He picked up the bag from between his feet, leaned over the stern of the boat and rested it lightly on the water for a moment. Then he let go. It sank slowly. He waited there, watching, afraid, perhaps, that it might rise again.

Antony began to count.

And now Cayley was back at his starting-place. He tied up the boat, looked carefully round to see that he had left no traces behind him, and then turned to the water again. For a long time, as it seemed to the watchers, he stood there, very big, very silent, in the moonlight. At last he seemed satisfied. Whatever his secret was, he had hidden it; and so with a gentle sigh, as unmistakable to Antony as if he had heard it, Cayley turned away and vanished again as quietly as he had come.

Antony gave him three minutes, and stepped out from the trees. He waited there for Bill to join him.

"Six," whispered Bill.

Antony nodded.

"I'm going round to the front of the house, Bill. You get back to your tree and watch, in case Cayley comes again. Your bedroom is the left-hand end one, and Cayley's the end but one? Is that right?"

Bill nodded.

"Right. Wait in hiding till I come back. I don't know how long I shall be, but don't be impatient. It will seem longer than it is." He patted Bill on the shoulder, and with a smile and a nod of the head he left him there.

What was in the bag? What could Cayley want to hide other than a key or a revolver? Keys and revolvers sink of themselves; no need to put them in a bag first. What was in the bag? Something which wouldn't sink of itself; something which needed to be helped with stones before it would hide itself safely in the mud.

Well, they would find that out. There was no object in worrying about it now. Bill had a dirty night's work in front of him. But where was the body which Antony had expected so confidently, or, if there were no body, where was Mark?

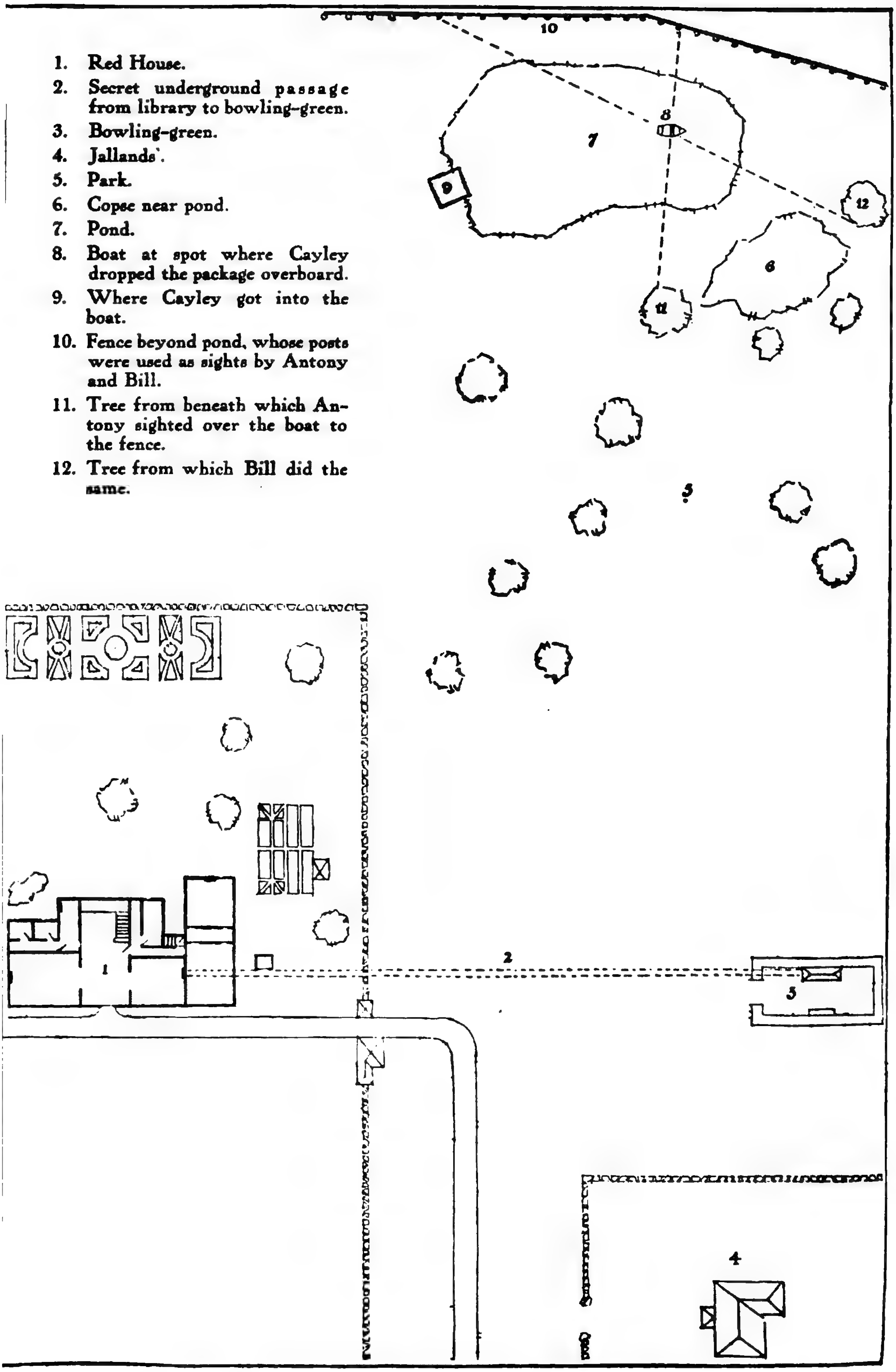
MORE immediately, however, where was Cayley? As quickly as he could, Antony had got to the front of the house and was now lying in the shrubbery which bordered the lawn, waiting for the light to go up in Cayley's window. If it went up in Bill's window, then they were discovered. It would mean that Cayley had glanced into Bill's room, had been suspicious of the dummy figure in the bed, and had turned up the light to make sure. After that, it was war between them. But if it went up in Cayley's room——

There was a light. Antony felt a sudden thrill of excitement. It was in Bill's room. War!

The light stayed there, shining vividly, for a wind had come up, blowing the moon behind a cloud, and casting a shadow over the rest of the house. Bill had left his curtains undrawn. It was careless of him; the first stupid thing he had done, but——

The moon slipped out again, and Antony laughed to himself in the bushes. There was another window beyond Cayley's, and there was no light in it. The declaration of war was postponed.

Antony lay there, watching Cayley into bed. After all, it was only polite to return Cayley's own solicitude earlier in the night. Politeness demanded that one should not



1. Red House.
2. Secret underground passage from library to bowling-green.
3. Bowling-green.
4. Jallands'.
5. Park.
6. Copse near pond.
7. Pond.
8. Boat at spot where Cayley dropped the package overboard.
9. Where Cayley got into the boat.
10. Fence beyond pond, whose posts were used as sights by Antony and Bill.
11. Tree from beneath which Antony sighted over the boat to the fence.
12. Tree from which Bill did the same.

PLAN OF RED HOUSE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS.

disport oneself on the pond until one's friends were comfortably tucked up.

MEANWHILE Bill was getting tired of waiting. His chief fear was that he might spoil everything by forgetting the number, "six." It was the sixth post. Six. He broke off a twig and divided it into six pieces. These he arranged on the ground in front of him. Six. He looked at the pond, counted up to the sixth post, and murmured "six" to himself again. Then he looked down at his twigs. One-two-three-four-five-six-seven. *Seven!* Was it seven? Or was that seventh bit of a twig an accidental bit which had been on the ground anyhow? Surely it was six! Had he said "six" to Antony? If so, Antony would remember, and it was all right. Six. He threw away the seventh twig and collected the other six together. Perhaps they would be safer in his pocket. Six. The height of a tall man—well, his own height. Six feet. Yes; that was the way to remember it. Feeling a little safer on the point, he began to wonder about the bag, and what Antony would say to it, and the possible depth of the water and of the mud at the bottom; and was still so wondering, and saying, "Good Lord, what a life!" to himself, when Antony reappeared.

Bill got up and came down the slope to meet him.

"Six," he said firmly. "Sixth post from the end."

"Good!" smiled Antony. "Mine was the eighteenth—a little way past it."

"What did you go off for?"

"To see Cayley into bed."

"Is it all right?"

"Yes. Better hang your coat over the sixth post, and then we shall see it more easily. I'll put mine on the eighteenth. Are you going to undress here or in the boat?"

"Some here, and some in the boat. You're quite sure that you wouldn't like to do the diving yourself?"

"Quite, thanks."

They had walked round to the other side of the pond. Coming to the sixth post of the fence, Bill took off his coat and put it in position, and then began his undressing, while Antony went off to mark the eighteenth post. When they were ready, they got into the boat, Antony taking the oars.

"Now, Bill, tell me as soon as I'm in a line with your two marks."

He moved slowly toward the middle of the pond.

"You're about there now," said Bill at last.

Antony stopped rowing and looked about him.

"Yes; that's pretty well right." He turned the boat's nose round until it pointed to the pine tree under which Bill had lain. "You see my tree and the other coat?"

"Yes," said Bill.

"Right! Now then, I'm going to row along this line until we're dead in between the two. Get it as exact as you can—for your own sake."

"Steady!" said Bill warningly. "Back a little—a little more—a little more—forward again. Right!"

Antony left the oars on the water and looked round. As far as he could tell, they were in an exact line with each pair of landmarks.

"Now then, Bill, in you go."

Bill pulled off his shirt and stood up. He he held a coil of rope which he had found in the boat and fastened to a ring in the stern.

"You mustn't dive from the boat, old boy," said Antony hastily. "You'll shift its position. Slide in gently."

Bill slid in from the stern and swam slowly round to Antony.

"What's it like?" said Antony.

"Cold. Well, here's luck to it."

He gave a sudden kick, flashed for a moment in the water, and was gone. Antony steadied the boat, and took another look at his landmarks.

Bill came up behind him with a loud explosion.

"It's pretty muddy, Tony," he protested.

"Weeds?"

"No; thank the Lord!"

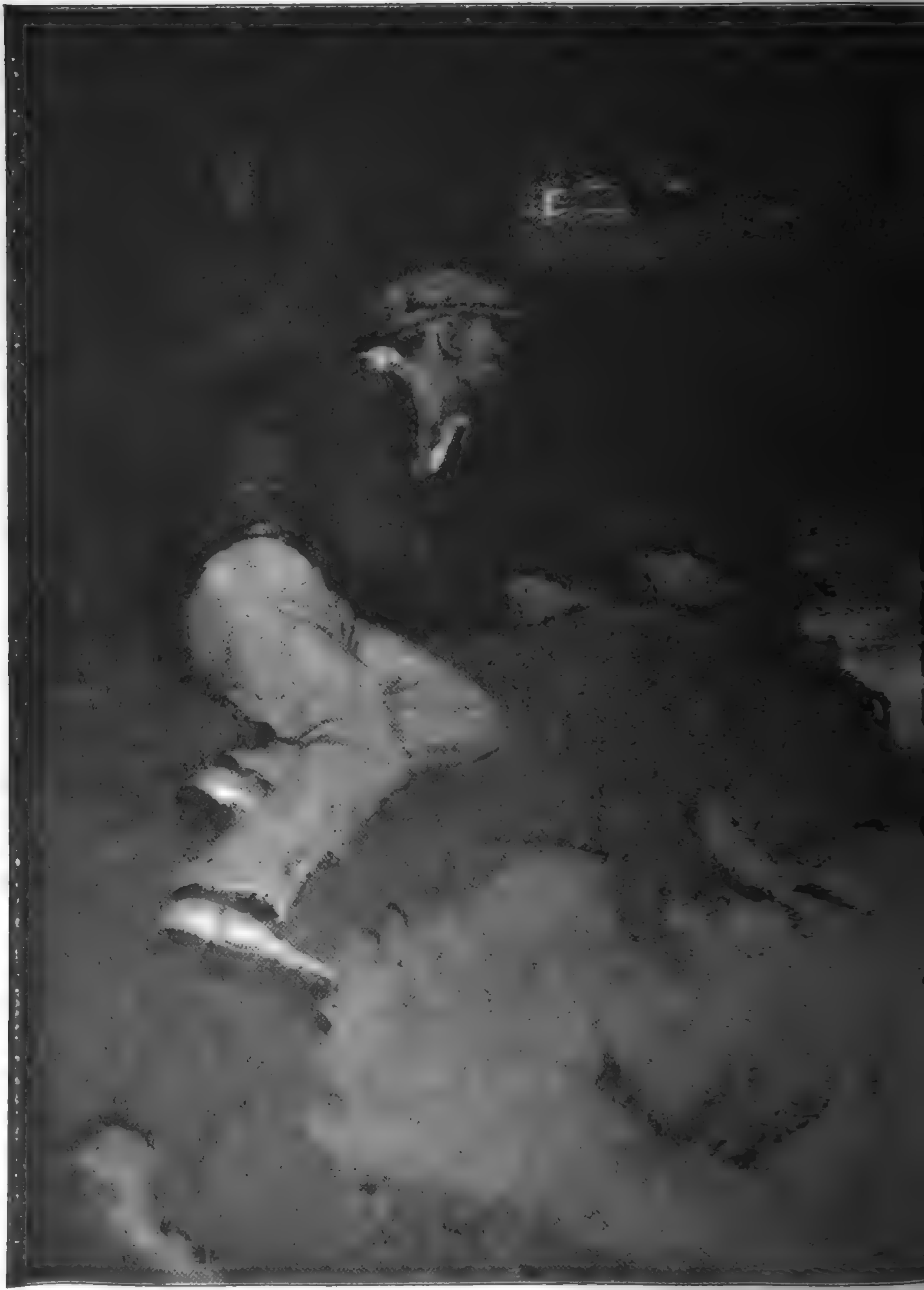
"Well, try again."

Bill gave another kick and disappeared. Again Antony coaxed the boat back into position, and again Bill popped up, this time in front of him.

"I feel that if I threw you a sardine," said Antony, with a smile, "you'd catch it in your mouth quite easily."

"It's awfully easy to be funny from where *you* are. How much longer have I got to go on doing this?"

Antony looked at his watch.



Very silently Cayley rowed toward the other end of the pond. He had stopped
it lightly on the water

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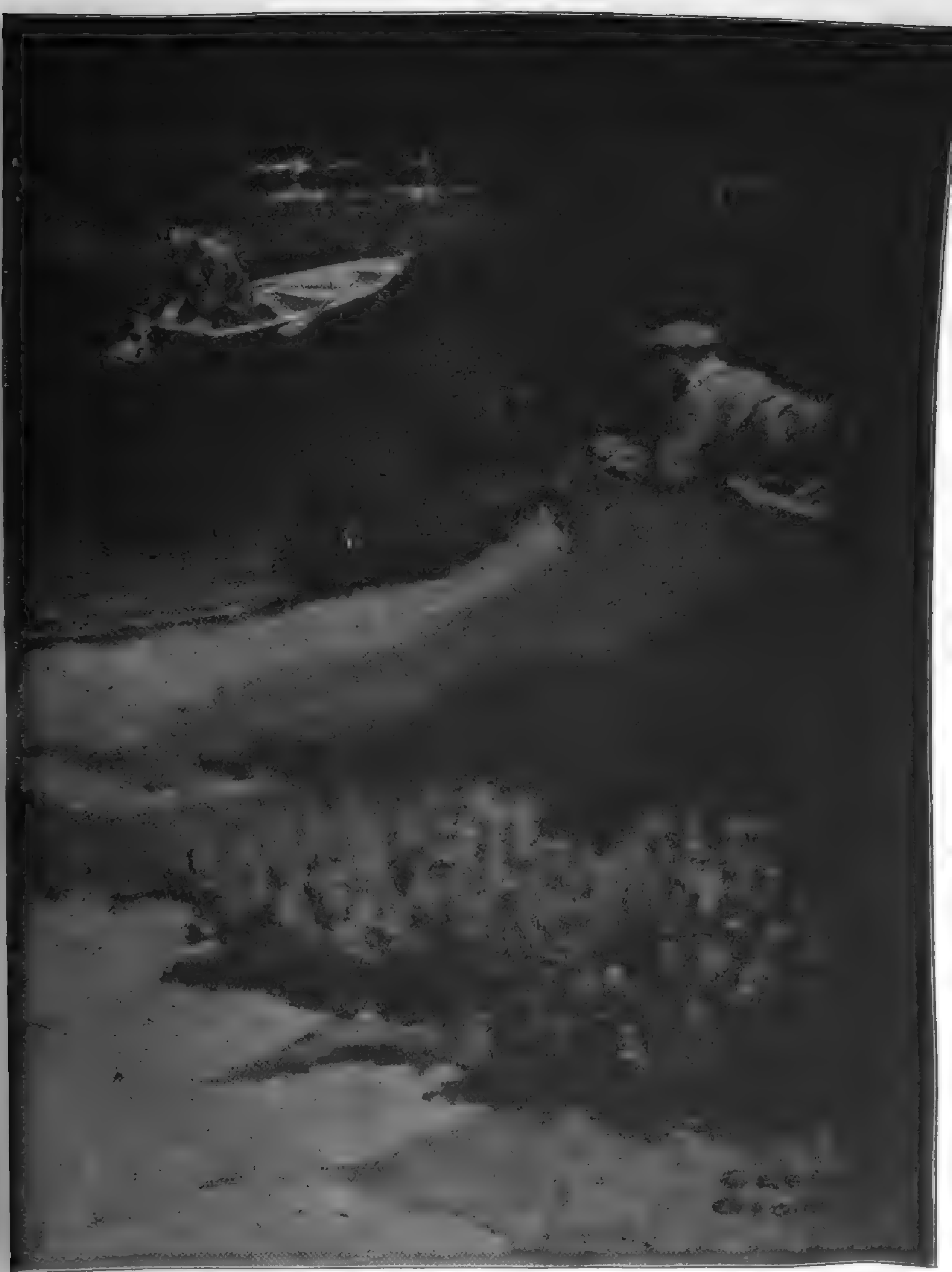

picked up the bag from between his feet, leaned over the stern of the boat and rested moment. Then he let go.

"About three hours. We must get back before daylight. But be quicker if you can, because it's rather cold for me sitting here."

Bill flicked a handful of water at him and disappeared again. He was under for almost a minute this time, and there was a grin on his face when it was visible again.

"I've got it, but it's devilish hard to get up. I'm not sure that it isn't too heavy for me."

"That's all right," said Antony. "Use the rope."

"Good man!" He paddled to the side, took one end of the rope and paddled back again. "Now, then."

Two minutes later the bag was safely in the boat. Bill clambered in after it, and Antony rowed back.

"Well done, William," he said quietly, as they landed.

He fetched their two coats, and then waited, the bag in his hand, while Bill dried and dressed himself. As soon as the latter was ready, he took his arm and led him into the copse. He put the bag down and felt in his pockets.

"I shall light a pipe before I open it," he said. "What about you?"

"Yes."

With great care they filled and lit their pipes. Bill's hand was a little unsteady. Antony noticed it and gave him a reassuring smile.

"Ready?"

"Yes."

They sat down, and taking the bag between his knees, Antony pressed the catch and opened it.

"Clothes!" said Bill.

Antony pulled out the top garment and shook it out. It was a wet brown-flannel coat.

"Do you recognize it?" he asked.

"Mark's brown-flannel suit."

"The one he is advertised as having run away in?"

"Yes. It looks like it. Of course he had a lot of clothes."

Antony put his hand in the breast-pocket and took out some letters. He considered them doubtfully for a moment.

"I suppose I'd better read them," he said. "I mean, just to see—" He looked inquiringly at Bill, who nodded. Antony turned on his torch and glanced at them. Bill waited anxiously.

"Yes. Mark— Hallo!"

"What is it?"

"The letter that Cayley was telling the inspector about. From Robert. 'Mark, your loving brother is coming to see you.' Yes; I suppose I had better keep this. Well, that's his coat. Let's have out the rest of it."

"They're all here," said Bill. "Shirt, tie, socks, underclothes, shoes—yes; all of them."

"All that he was wearing yesterday?"

"Yes."

"What do you make of it?"

Bill shook his head and asked another question.

"Is it what you expected?"

Antony laughed suddenly.

"It's too absurd," he said. "I expected—well, you know what I expected. A body. A body in a suit of clothes. Well, perhaps he thought it would be safer to hide them separately. The body here, and the clothes in the passage, where they would never betray themselves. And now he takes a great deal of trouble to hide the clothes here, and doesn't bother about the body at all." He shook his head. "I'm a bit lost, for the moment, Bill, and that's the fact."

"Anything else there?"

Antony felt in the bag.

"Stones and—yes; there's something else." He took it out and held it up. "There we are, Bill."

It was the office key.

"Then you were right."

ANTONY felt in the bag again, and then turned it gently upside down on the grass. A dozen large stones fell out—and something else. He flashed down his torch.

"Another key," he said.

He put the two keys in his pocket, and sat there for a long time in silence, thinking. Bill was silent, too, not liking to interrupt his thoughts, but at last he said,

"Shall I put these things back, Tony?"

Antony looked up with a start.

"What? Oh, yes. No; I'll put them back. You give me a light, will you?"

Very slowly and carefully he put the clothes back in the bag, pausing as he took up each garment, in the certainty, as it seemed to Bill, that it had something to tell him if only he could read it.

When the last of them was inside, he still waited there on his knees, thinking.

"That's the lot," said Bill.

Antony nodded at him.

"Yes; that's the lot," he said; "and that's the funny thing about it. You're sure it is the lot?"

"What do you mean?"

"Give me the torch a moment." He took it and flashed it over the ground between them. "Yes; that's the lot. It's funny." He stood up, the bag in his hands. "Now, let's find a hiding-place for these, and then—" He said no more, but stepped off through the trees, Bill following him meekly.

As soon as they had got the bag off their hands and were clear of the copse, Antony became more communicative. He took the two keys out of his pocket.

"One of them is the office key, I suppose, and the other is the key of the passage cupboard. So I thought that perhaps we might have a look at the cupboard?"

"Do you really think it is?"

"Well, I don't see what else it can be."

"But why should he want to throw it away?"

"Because it has now done its work, whatever it was, and he wants to wash his hands of the passage. He'd throw the passage away if he could. I don't think it matters much one way or another, and I don't suppose there's anything to find in the cupboard, but I feel that we must look."

"Do you still think Mark's body might be there?"

"No. And yet where else can it be? Unless I'm hopelessly wrong, and Cayley never killed him at all."

Bill hesitated, wondering if he dare advance his theory.

"I know you'll think I'm an ass——"

"My dear Bill, I'm such an obvious ass myself that I should be delighted to think you are too."

"Well then, suppose Mark did kill Robert, and Cayley helped him to escape, just as we thought at first. I know you proved afterward that it was impossible, but suppose it happened in a way we don't know about and for reasons we don't know about. I mean, there are such a lot of funny things about the whole show that—well, almost anything might have happened."

"You're quite right. Well?"

"Well, then, this clothes business. Doesn't that seem rather to bear out the escaping theory? Mark's brown suit was known to the police. Couldn't Cayley have brought him another one in the passage, to escape in, and then have had the brown one on his hands? And thought it safest to hide it in the pond?"

"Yes," said Antony thoughtfully, and then, "Go on."

Bill went on eagerly.

"It all seems to fit in, you know. I mean, even with your first theory—that Mark killed him accidentally and then came to Cayley for help. Of course, if Cayley had played fair, he'd have told Mark that he had nothing to be afraid of. But he isn't playing fair; he wants to get Mark out of the way because of the girl. Well, this is his chance. He makes Mark as frightened as possible, and tells him that his only hope is to run away. Well, naturally, he does all he can to get him well away, because if Mark is caught, the whole story of Cayley's treachery comes out."

"Yes. But isn't it overdoing it rather to make him change his underclothes and everything? It wastes a good deal of time, you know."

BILL was pulled up short, and said "Oh!" in great disappointment.

"No; it's not as bad as that, Bill," said Antony with a smile. "I dare say the underclothes could be explained. But here's the difficulty: Why did Mark need to change from brown to blue, or whatever it was, when Cayley was the only person who saw him in brown?"

"The police description of him says that he is in a brown suit."

"Yes; because Cayley told the police. You see, even if Mark had had lunch in his brown suit, and the servants had noticed it, Cayley could always have pretended that he had changed into blue after lunch, because only Cayley saw him afterward. So if Cayley had told the inspector that he was wearing blue, Mark could have escaped quite comfortably in his brown, without needing to change at all."

"But that's just what he did do!" cried Bill triumphantly. "What fools we are!"

Antony looked at him in surprise, and then shook his head.

"Yes, yes!" insisted Bill. "Of course! Don't you see? Mark did change after lunch, and, to give him more of a chance of getting away, Cayley lied and said that he was wearing the brown suit in which the servants had seen him. Well, then he was afraid that the police might examine Mark's clothes and find the brown suit still there; so he hid it, and then dropped it in the pond afterward."

He turned eagerly to his friend, but Antony said nothing. Bill began to speak again and was promptly waved into silence.

"Don't say anything more, old boy; you've given me quite enough to think about. Don't let's bother about it to-night. We'll just have a look at this cupboard and get to bed."

But the cupboard had not much to tell them that night. It was empty save for a few old bottles.

"Well, that's that," said Bill.

But Antony, on his knees with the torch in his hand, continued to search for something.

"What are you looking for?" asked Bill at last.

"Something that isn't there," said Antony, getting up and dusting his trousers. And he locked the door again.

THE inquest was at three o'clock; thereafter Antony could have no claim on the hospitality of the Red House. By ten o'clock his bag was packed and waiting to be taken to the George. To Bill, coming up-stairs after a more prolonged breakfast, this early-morning bustle was a little surprising.

"What's the hurry?" he asked.

"None. But we don't want to come back here after the inquest. Get your packing over now and then we can have the morning to ourselves."

He turned to go to his room, and then came back again. "Are we going to tell Cayley that we're staying at the George?

"You're not staying at the George, Bill. Not officially. You're going back to London."

"Oh!"

"Yes. Ask Cayley to have your luggage sent in to Stanton, ready for you when you catch a train there after the inquest. You can tell him that you've got to see the Bishop of London at once. The fact that you are hurrying back to London to be confirmed will make it seem more natural that I should resume my interrupted solitude at the George as soon as you have gone."

"Then where do I sleep to-night?"

"Officially, I suppose, in Fulham Palace; unofficially, I suspect, in my bed, unless they've got another spare room at the George. I've put in your confirmation robe—I mean your pajamas and brushes and things—in my bag, ready for you. Is there anything else you want to know? No? Then go and pack. And meet me at ten-thirty beneath the blasted oak or in the hall or somewhere."

An hour later, having communicated their official plans to Cayley, they wandered out together into the park.

"Well?" said Bill, as they sat down underneath a convenient tree. "Talk away."

"I had many bright thoughts in my bath this morning," began Antony. "The brightest one of all was that we were being blamed fools, and working at this thing from the wrong end altogether."

"Well, that's a helpful thought."

"Of course it's very hampering being a detective, when you don't know anything about detecting, and when nobody knows that you're doing detection, and you can't have people up to cross-examine them, and you have neither the energy nor the means to make proper inquiries, and, in short, when you're doing the whole thing in a thoroughly amateur, haphazard way."

"For amateurs I don't think we're doing at all badly," protested Bill.

"No; not for amateurs. But if we had been professionals, I believe we should have gone at it from the other end. The Robert end. We've been wondering about Mark and Cayley all the time. Now let's wonder about Robert for a bit."

"We know so little about him."

"Well, let's see what we do know. First of all, then, we know vaguely that he was a bad lot—the sort of brother who is hushed up in front of other people."

"Yes."

"We know that he announced his approaching arrival to Mark in a rather unpleasant letter, which I have in my pocket."

"Yes."

"And then we know rather a curious thing. We know that Mark told you all that this black sheep was coming. Now, why did he tell you?"

Bill was thoughtful for a moment.

"I suppose," he said slowly, "that he knew we were bound to see him, and thought that the best way was to be quite frank about him."

"But *were* you bound to see him? You were all away playing golf."

"We were bound to see him if he stayed in the house that night."

"Very well, then. That's one thing we've discovered. Mark knew that Robert was staying in the house that night. Or shall we put it this way—he knew that there was no chance of getting Robert out of the house at once?"

BILL looked at his friend eagerly.

"Go on," he said. "This is getting interesting."

"He also knew something else," went on Antony. "He knew that Robert was bound to betray his real character to you as soon as you met him. He couldn't pass him off on you as just a traveled brother from the Dominions, with perhaps a bit of an accent; he had to tell you at once, because you were bound to find out that Robert was a wastrel."

"Yes. That's sound enough."

"Well, now, doesn't it strike you that Mark made up his mind about all that rather quickly?"

"How do you mean?"

"He got this letter at breakfast. He read it; and directly he had read it he began to confide in you all. That is to say, in about one second he thought out the whole business and came to a decision—to two decisions. He considered the possibility of getting Robert out of the way before you came back, and decided that it was impossible. He considered the possibility of Robert's behaving like an ordinary decent person in public, and decided that it was very unlikely. He came to those two decisions instantaneously, as he was reading the letter. Isn't that rather quick work?"

"Well, what's the explanation?"

Antony waited until he had refilled and lighted his pipe before answering.

"What's the explanation? Well, let's leave it for a moment and take another look at the two brothers. In conjunction, this time, with Mrs. Norbury."

"Mrs. Norbury?" said Bill, surprised.

"Yes. Mark hoped to marry Miss Norbury. Now, if Robert really was a blot upon the family honor, Mark would want to do one of two things. Either keep it from the Norburys altogether or else, if it had to come out, tell them himself before the news came to them indirectly. Well, he told them. But the funny thing is that he told them the day before Robert's letter came. Robert came, and was killed, the day before yesterday, Tuesday. Mark told Mrs. Norbury about him on Monday. What do you make of that?"

"Coincidence," said Bill, after careful thought. "He'd always meant to tell her; his suit was prospering, and just before it was finally settled, he told her. That happened to be Monday. On Tuesday he got Robert's letter, and felt very glad that he'd told her in time."

"Well, it might be that, but it's rather a curious coincidence. And here is something which makes it very curious indeed. It only occurred to me in the bath this morning. Inspiring place, a bathroom. Well, it's this: He told her on Monday morning, on his way to Middleston in the car."

"Well?"

"Well."

"Sorry, Tony; I'm dense this morning."

"In the car, Bill. And how near can the car get to Jallands'?"

"About six hundred yards."

"Yes. And on his way to Middleston, on some business or other, Mark stops the car, walks six hundred yards down the hill to Jallands', says, 'Oh, by the way, Mrs. Norbury, I don't think I ever told you that I have a shady brother called Robert,' walks six hundred yards up the hill again, gets into the car, and goes off to Middleston. Is that likely?"

Bill frowned heavily.

"Yes; but I don't see what you're getting at. Likely or not likely, we know he did do it."

"Of course he did. All I mean is that he must have had some strong reason for telling Mrs. Norbury at once. And the reason I suggest is that he knew on that morning—Monday morning, not Tuesday—that Robert was coming to see him, and had to be in first with the news."

"But—but——"

"And that would explain the other

point—his instantaneous decision at breakfast to tell you all about his brother. It wasn't instantaneous. He knew on Monday that Robert was coming, and decided then that you would all have to know."

"Then how do you explain the letter?"

"Well, let's have a look at it."

Antony took the letter from his pocket and spread it out on the grass between them.

> Mark, your loving brother is coming to see you to-morrow, all the way from Australia. I give you warning so that you will be able to conceal your surprise but not, I hope, your pleasure. Expect him at three or thereabouts.

"No date mentioned, you see," said Antony. "Just 'to-morrow.' "

"But he got this on Tuesday."

"Did he?"

"Well, he read it out to us on Tuesday."

"Oh, yes; he read it out to you."

BILL read the letter again, and then turned it over and looked at the back of it. The back of it had nothing to say to him.

"What about the post-mark?" he asked.

"We haven't got the envelope, unfortunately."

"And you think that he got this letter on Monday."

"I'm inclined to think so, Bill. Anyhow, I think—I feel almost certain—that he knew on Monday that his brother was coming."

"Is that going to help us much?"

"No. It makes it more difficult. There's something rather uncanny about it all. I don't understand it." He was silent for a little, and then added, "I wonder if the inquest is going to help us."

"What about last night? I'm longing to hear what you make of that. Have you been thinking it out at all?"

"Last night," said Antony thoughtfully to himself. "Yes; last night wants some explaining."

Bill waited hopefully for him to explain. What, for instance, had Antony been looking for in the cupboard?

"I think," began Antony slowly, "that after last night we must give up the idea that Mark has been killed—killed, I mean, by Cayley. I don't believe anybody would go to so much trouble to hide a suit of clothes when he had a body on his hands. The body would seem so much more important. I think we may take it now that the clothes are all that Cayley had to hide."

"But why not have kept them in the passage?"

"He was frightened of the passage. Miss Norris knew about it."

"Well then, in his own bedroom, or even in Mark's? For all you or I or anybody knew, Mark might have had two brown suits. He probably had, I should think."

"Probably. But I doubt if that would reassure Cayley. The brown suit hid a secret, and therefore the brown suit had to be hidden. We all know that in theory the safest hiding-place is the most obvious, but in practise very few people have the nerve to risk it."

Bill looked rather disappointed.

"Then we just come back to where we were," he complained. "Mark killed his brother, and Cayley helped him to escape through the passage, either in order to compromise him or because there was no other way out of it. And he helped him by telling a lie about his brown suit."

Antony smiled at him in genuine amusement.

"Bad luck, Bill," he said sympathetically. "There's only one murder, after all. I'm awfully sorry about it. It was my fault, for——"

"Shut up, you ass! You know I didn't mean that."

"Well, you seemed awfully disappointed."

Bill said nothing for a little, and then, with a sudden laugh, confessed.

"It was so exciting yesterday," he said apologetically, "and we seemed to be just getting there, and discovering the most wonderful things, and now——"

"And now?"

"Well, it's so much more ordinary."

Antony gave a shout of laughter.

"Ordinary!" he cried. "Ordinary! Well, I'm damned! Ordinary! If only *one* thing would happen in an ordinary way, we might do something, but *everything* is ridiculous."

Bill brightened up again.

"Ridiculous? How?"

"Every way. Take those ridiculous clothes we found last night. You can explain the brown suit, but why the underclothes? You can explain the underclothes in some absurd way, if you like—you can say that Mark always changed his underclothes whenever he interviewed anybody from Australia—but why, in that case, my dear Watson, *why* didn't he change his collar?"

"His collar?" said Bill in amazement.

"His collar, Watson."

"I don't understand."

"And it's all so ordinary," scoffed Antony.

"Sorry, Tony; I didn't mean that. Tell me about the collar."

"Well, that's all. There was no collar in the bag last night. Shirt, socks, tie—everything except a collar. Why?"

"Was that what you were looking for in the cupboard?" said Bill eagerly.

"Of course. 'Why no collar?' I said. For some reason Cayley considered it necessary to hide all Mark's clothes; not just the suit, but everything which he was wearing or supposed to be wearing at the time of the murder. But he hadn't hidden the collar. Why? Had he left it out by mistake? So I looked in the cupboard. It wasn't there. Had he left it out on purpose? If so, why—and where was it? Naturally I began to say to myself: 'Where have I seen a collar lately? A collar all by itself'? And I remembered—what, Bill?"

Bill frowned heavily to himself and shook his head.

"Don't ask me, Tony. I can't— By Jove!" He threw up his head. "In the basket in the office bedroom!"

"Exactly."

"But is that the one?"

"The one that goes with the rest of the clothes? I don't know. Where else can it be? But if so, why send the collar quite casually to the wash in the ordinary way, and take immense trouble to hide everything else? Why, why, why?"

Bill bit hard at his pipe, but could think of nothing to say.

"Anyhow," said Antony, getting up restlessly, "I'm certain of one thing: Mark knew on the Monday that Robert was coming here."

The result of the inquest and the solution of this great mystery are told in the concluding instalment of "The Red House Murder" in December EVERYBODY'S, out November 15th.

Two Unusual Stories

What is the plague of the fight-manager's life—the hardest nut he has to crack? You'll find the answer in

"Hearts and Fists" By William Bullock

Mr. Bullock's prize-ring tales are already well known to EVERYBODY'S readers through the two stories by him—"The Hereditary Punch" and "Mama's Boy"—published in recent numbers.

"Giants and Dwarfs" By F. St. Mars

is the other story that we think will be called unusual. Ask yourself this question: "Does the ant always win?" and then read "Giants and Dwarfs."

In December EVERYBODY'S—*out November 15th*

Time Out!

If You Have Never Personally Engaged in Athletics You Don't Know the Thrills and the Heartaches of Those Who Have. It's Serious Business to them—An Unusual Story by the Author of "Thalassa! Thalassa!"

By William Almon Wolff

IN THE procession of the months September had just come. But August was lingering. The heat of August was in the dull, heavy air, that errant puffs of a lazy wind could hardly stir. Far away woods were burning; the smoke of that distant fire, diffused, far spread, lay over Brayton in a murky, acrid haze. It reddened the sun that was dipping down in the west and throwing a long shadow across the football field from the unpainted wooden stand the boys themselves had built a year before.

There was a tangle of wild growth at the north end of the field, so close to the goal-posts that a kicked ball was lost in it sometimes. There goldenrod and asters nodded; there the glowing red of the sumac proclaimed that this heat had come upon the heels of early frosts; there poison-ivy ran like a leaping flame. Beyond lay open country; a lone house here and there, where the town had thrown out the feelers of its growth; very far away deep woods and rising hills with the smoke pall of the fire over them.

The college buildings lay to the south. You saw a space of parched grass, brown and sear now, burnt by the fierce summer of the north, awaiting the covering of deep snow that would shelter it from a winter no less fierce. Great trees stood there, shading buildings that time had mellowed somewhat, and so redeemed a little from their ugliness. But there was no beauty in them; they stood, uncompromising, rigid, symmetrical in their grouping, hard and rectangular in their outlines; use had been in the thoughts of those who reared them; use and the instant need of that earlier time that had seen the placing of this college in a land but newly won from lynx and wolf and prowling Indian.

The field was rough; it was covered with parched grass, worn bare in places in the spring, when the baseball diamond had been laid out upon it. The grass stood in rough, spiky hummocks; in one corner the ground sloped sharply down; it was, perhaps, the poorest apology for a football field any college in America could have shown you. Yet chapters of the long history of a great game had been written concerning it and the things that had been done upon its rough and shabby surface.

Half a dozen boys were at work upon it then. As best they could they were marking out the gridiron, dipping long-handled brushes into pails of whitewash. They were uncertain, wavy lines that they made. But they would serve; they began to take form; they were, roughly, five yards apart. And the four lines that bounded the playing surface had been rightly surveyed. Here was a far cry from the mathematical exactitude of Eastern bowls and stadiums, where broad ribbons of white as true as plumb-lines cross turf as smooth as velvet and as well groomed as a woman's hair. But that was a small matter.

A boy came on the field, walked under the south goal. He wore patched moleskins, blue stockings broadly striped with gold, a jersey to match them. His skin, burnt brown, showed through a torn place at his shoulder. He carried an old, discolored ball, grown heavy from long use, but true still and serviceable.

" 'Lo, Bummy," said one of the workers, looking up. This was Bummy Carter, 'varsity half. He nodded; began, from the twenty-five-yard line, to practise drop kicks. He got the ball away quickly; it soared slowly; went over, time after time, squarely between the posts. There was no speed in the ball he kicked; it floated lazily, always, though, it had the length, the carry, that was needed. So Charles Brickley, of Harvard, used to kick; it was an agonizing thing to watch his ball, threatening always to fall short and yet, somehow, not doing so.

One by one others came to follow Carter. They had a couple of balls, even more worn and decrepit than his. And most of them spread out, tossing the ball high and far, or, by way of variety, with a short throw, as swift as a bullet's flight. One man practised over and over again, taking that short throw while he ran at full speed; laughed at his failures, turned to grin triumphantly when he succeeded.

AND then, abruptly, something happened. Something of light gaiety, of the spirit of fun, passed from the field. A moment before there had been a dozen boys playing, enjoying a sport. Then there were tight-lipped workers, intent upon the performance of a task under a master's eyes.

Another player had come. About him there was that look of the habit of command that even in a boy is not to be mistaken or overlooked. He was big, big in every way. Not exceptionally tall and certainly not fat, he was still impressive in his sheer bulk. The pads under his jersey made his shoulders stand out grotesquely; they were absurdly square. His arms fell from them like flails; they swung as he walked across the field. His gait was awkward, yet there was about it a superb, unconscious rhythm.

His hair was a shock of yellow; it was of the color of a field of wheat, tossing in the wind. His cheeks were tanned and weathered; the skin was drawn tight over his high cheek-bones. His eyes were blue and cold; they were like the light that lies deep in a cake of ice. His nostrils flared out above his big, straight mouth; his chin was square, aggressive, blunt. Here was a boy born for mastery, ruthlessly determined to achieve it, harsh, intolerant, superbly confident of himself.

And you would have had no need of telling to know that this was the captain of the team. John Stark—Buck Stark. He played half; seeing him, nine men out of ten would have guessed he was a tackle. But to see him smash a line—to follow him through a broken field, twisting, turning, shaking himself clear by the sheer crashing impact of his body when the need arose, sending tacklers down with the vicious thrust of the heel of his hand in a terrific straight arm! Oh, a back of backs, this Stark! He was of the line of the men who, through all the ages, have made their bodies the servants of their souls, their spirits; the men who have stood alone in a breach, who have laughed at the seas from the prows of their ships, who have risen in their stirrups, yelling, as cavalry rides home.

"All right!" he said. He made no answer to the greetings that he heard, may not have heard them, indeed. "Doc's late—be here soon. Come on over to the dummy."

The stuffed canvas figure swung absurdly from the rope that was stretched between two posts in one corner of the field. Below it the earth had been turned up with a spade, to soften it a little—but only a little. It was baked too hard for anything to make it really soft. Stark judged the distance, drew a line with his heel across the ground.

"Take off here!" he said. "Like this——"

He went back, began to run, flashed into full speed, left the ground at his mark and fell upon the dummy like a thunderbolt. His arms closed about the sagging, straw-stuffed legs just above the knees; he turned as he fell and shot along the ground on his side, his hips protected by the heavy padding of his canvas trousers.

"Sheehan!" he called, as he came back and stood beside his mark.

Sheehan was waiting; a line had formed. He came down, made a clean tackle, got up, smiling. Man after man ran, took off, made the tackle. One or two hesitated at the mark; some couldn't leave the ground at all at first, but leaped, half-heartedly, with one foot. But none could escape so. Back they had to go, until, at last, the baleful look, the whip-like words, conquered some old, instinctive reluctance and they leaped fairly out into space, plunging head foremost, as one dives into water. Three times each man was sent down; they were stiff and sore when they had done.

This dummy was a new thing at Brayton;

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they despised it, hated it. Stark shared their feelings. But the coach had set it up; had told him to see that the men used it.

"Goin' to scrimmage, Buck?" asked Swanson, the big full-back. His eyes were gleaming; his hands were working. "Got two teams out—some showing, I'll say!"

"No scrimmage to-day!" It was not Stark who answered, but a newcomer. This was Doc Hasbrook, the coach. A lean, tall man, this Hasbrook; dreadfully thin, tragically white, save for two high spots of color on his high cheek-bones; with lustrous, black eyes and thin, bloodless lips; with hands as white and delicate as a girl's, their blue veins standing out. "Signals, first. Line up, now."

He looked them over as they stood, waiting.

"Truesdell, quarter; Schmidt, take the ball, center; Platt and Pulaski, guards; Norton and Berger, tackles; Sheehan and MacGregor, ends; Swanson, full; Stark and Carter, halves. Pick up a team with the rest, Crawford. Dope out a set of signals and learn them—*learn* them! Use last year's plays—I'll give you something new later on."

The men he had named had fallen into their places. He took them down the field. And then, slowly, patiently, consulting a note-book he took from his pocket—he was in street clothes—he began to work out with them the code numbers for the first simple plays. Over and over again they ran through each one.

THOSE boys were hard; they had been born hard. All their lives they had worked. They had grown up on farms; they had wrestled with floods in spring, with the deep winter snows. Their bodies were as strong and as supple as so many springs of finely tempered steel. Yet they grew tired that afternoon under the driving of that thin man, wasted by the disease that was destroying him, turning from them, at intervals, to yield to the spasm of a racking cough. His spirit wore them down. It bent them to his will; imposed upon them a labor they could not understand. The sweat ran from them; their knees ached intolerably from the constant stooping; in their backs unaccustomed muscles groaned and complained.

Yet they were silent, obedient. Carter, muttering some complaint to Swanson as they limped up, felt Stark's eyes upon him and grew still; the sneer that was curling Sheehan's lips was frozen.

"All right!" Hasbrook said at last. It was nearly dark; stars were showing here and there through the haze; the last red glow of the sunset was fading. "Twice around the field and in!"

He walked slowly along the field; turned to watch the straggling pack that Stark was leading when he reached its edge. He nodded to the captain as the second lap was completed; Stark slowed down to walking-pace beside him; the others went ahead.

"Don't see any use in all that drilling," said Stark bluntly.

"I know you don't. You will, at Cambridge next month."

Stark's throat held some deep sound, a growl, a snarl—some sound such as an animal, marking its prey, might utter.

"Harvard!" he said. "We'll beat them—like we've beaten every one else since you came along, Doc."

"Hope so. That's what we're trying for," said Hasbrook. "But, Buck! Man—you don't know! I don't, either. I never saw one of the big Eastern teams play. But I know they've got something—something you fellows haven't ever seen or dreamed of! It's—I guess it's like grass." He laughed as he spurned the tough grass with his foot. "Grass!" he said. "Good enough grass, some of it. Just as good as the grass that grows in England, in some duke's park. But you've read about an English lawn, Buck?"

Stark nodded.

"It's all grass," Hasbrook went on. "But we can't get any such lawns as they have. Nowhere in this country—not yet. And it's not just climate. It's—I guess it's time. They say it's taken hundreds of years to grow those lawns. And I guess football's something like that, Buck. It takes time to grow something you can depend on, like what they've got at Harvard."

Stark grunted.

"Ever play in a losing game?" Hasbrook's voice grew shrill. "Did you ever know what it was to see the other team score on you a couple of times—before you'd get anywhere near them? You—what do you know about football? Oh, you can play—but I'll tell you you don't know what the game is till you've been backed down over your own line! That's when all the sort of thing I'm going to hammer into you counts—knowing things instinctively—the stuff the whole game's built on——"

Stark stared at him.

"You fellows are going up against something next month that's so different from anything you've ever known that you might be going to another country!" Hasbrook snapped. "You'll find a team that knows all about you and the way you play, and that's no more scared than you are of that bunch from Saint Joe's that you're playing here Saturday!

"You've been throwing your forward passes as you pleased for three years. And next month you'll find a defense that's taken care of every forward pass attack that's ever been tried against it yet. Maybe we've got something new—I hope so. But I'm not betting on it. We'll be lucky if Sheehan gets away once. They'll cover you so that if you get away twice in the game you'll be as good as Mahan. And when you're playing a team like that you don't have time to stop and think what to do. You've got to be fixed so that you do things without thinking—the way you save yourself from falling when you slip on the ice! Football! You fellows haven't begun to learn the game yet—and I've got six weeks to teach you! Six weeks!"

Stark met that outburst in silence. It was not his way to argue; he preferred listening, always, to speech. But his eyes were sullen; there was no yielding in the hard, straight line of his mouth; his chin stood out a little further than before, perhaps.

NO ONE knew better than Stark himself what Doc Hasbrook had meant to football at Brayton, what he had done for the game there. But of that all the football world knew something.

They had played football raggedly, without system, at Brayton for a long time. In the old, early days any good Eastern preparatory school could have played rings around a Brayton team. Big, slow, awkward, those boys from the farms had played the game with a fierce joy in its roughness, in the hand-to-hand struggle it afforded. They had had their ups and downs; a good team one year, with a victory over State to crown the season; a bad one the next, with State taking its turn to be uppermost.

And then had come Stark's freshman year, bringing him, Swanson, Carter, MacGregor, Sheehan, one or two others—better material, in the rough, than Brayton had ever known—better, indeed, than comes to most colleges. They were green; they were crude; of the fine points of the game, its tactics, its strategy, they knew nothing.

Brayton, in those days, had had a coach sometimes; more often the team had just grown, with some old player on the faculty, an occasional graduate, the year's captain, to give it what teaching it received. But in that first year of Stark's, Doc Hasbrook had joined the faculty as an instructor in mathematics, driven to that northern climate by his doctors and his lungs.

Doc, in his own college days in Chicago, had never been strong enough to play football himself; he had played for the last time in high school. But he loved the game with that same pure passion that makes some men paint pictures and others explore the mysterious realms of the higher mathematics. To him the game was life itself in miniature; through it he studied war and trade, and all the problems of humanity. Locked in his mind were scores, hundreds, of theories, tricks, devices; he found in those toughened, wiry boys at Brayton such joy as a scientist might have taken in the gift of a perfectly equipped laboratory.

And under him, in three years, Brayton had become, in its own circle, invincible. In Stark's sophomore year Nebraska, having, with a startling condescension, given Brayton a game, was swept down to a defeat so crushing that the whole world of Western football stood aghast. And after Hasbrook's third dazzling season the mail had brought, one January morning when all Brayton lay under a three-foot fall of snow, the news of a miracle. For Harvard had asked Brayton for a game; invited her to come to Cambridge, that the East might see and surprise this newest football comet.

No one knew better than Hasbrook himself upon how shaky a foundation the towering edifice of Brayton's football fame had been reared. He had worked for speed; a speed so dazzling that Brayton's opponents were beaten before they really knew a game was under way. Geared to that amazing speed, equipped with a passing attack the like of which the West, at least, had never seen, Brayton had ridden roughshod, for

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three years, over all neighboring opposition. Hasbrook's teams threw away the rule that had always dominated Eastern football; cared as little for continuous possession of the ball as does a basket-ball five. Forward and lateral passes of astonishing length, executed while thrower and receiver alike were running at full speed, were a constant recourse; the first touch-down against Nebraska had come when Stark, starting to run behind his own goal line, after feinting to punt, had thrown the ball thirty yards to Sheehan, streaking down the field.

Brayton had been scored upon often; it was no uncommon thing to see a score of sixty or seventy to twelve or eighteen. But Hasbrook had built up his teams on the theory that the overwhelming attack was the best and soundest defense; had deliberately sacrificed the fundamentals of the game, of which, in any event, he knew little, to the dizzy superstructure his own mind had evolved.

And the fame of Brayton, under Hasbrook, had spread both East and West. There had been talk, last year, of an invitation to play in the Tournament of Roses at Pasadena on New Year's Day; that plan had fallen through. But Walter Camp himself had come to Brayton, on his way to California; the result of his visit had been the naming of Stark as one of the All-America halfs, and the placing of Mike Sheehan at end on the second team—honor enough, truly, for a college with an enrolment of three hundred students when it was at the crest! And he had said that Brayton's attack, as Hasbrook had developed it, was the only new thing football had seen since the perfection of the Harvard hidden ball offense.

Yet now Hasbrook was turning cautious. With that record behind him he was drilling those veterans of his, Stark, Sheehan and the rest, as though they were beginners. Through those first hot days of practise he drove them, teaching them simple plays, such as, through their three glorious years, they had scorned to use; often forbidding them the delights of scrimmaging with the devoted scrub, giving them no chance at all to display their skill with those long passes, in which the ball had flown the length of the field in half a dozen plays.

St. Joseph's came, for the first game, and in the rough stand dazed students sat and saw their team, their glorious, all-conquering team, that in six weeks was to play before massed thousands in the Harvard stadium, held to a beggarly score of two touchdowns and a field-goal! Not once did the old, whirlwind attack come into play; it was a constant, steady, hammering, with a kick, always, whenever St. Joe held for two downs.

There was the silence of dismay in the stands. But Doc Hasbrook, hunched over on a bench beside the field, smiled; he was well pleased. And a spectacled stranger, who was going back to Boston that night, looked thoughtful—extremely thoughtful. He had not seen the Brayton team of wide report in action, but he had seen something vastly more significant to a scout upon whose reports Harvard coaches had depended for many years.

Hasbrook was developing his plan; forging a new sort of weapon, vastly different from that half-disciplined battle-ax with which, for three years, he had beaten down all opposition. Against the crude teams that were Brayton's natural rivals, no better trained in the fundamentals of the game than Brayton itself, a crushing blow had served well enough. But against Harvard there would be need of the finer instrument; strategy must come to the aid of force and sheer speed.

IN STARK there survived, despite the growing power of the team he led, a sullen, half-articulate opposition to Hasbrook's plans. He did not rebel openly; he did not challenge the authority of the coach. He allowed no one to do that; he went through, without complaint, every exercise Hasbrook prescribed. But he was aloof; his spirit could not subdue itself to this grinding business, this welding of eleven men into a disciplined and smoothly working whole, a new entity, to which each man must sacrifice something of himself.

It was little Truesdell, the quarter-back, really, who came nearest to understanding—perhaps because it was by his very ability to match sheer brawn and power with wit and cunning that he had won his place on the team. Truesdell, on this new sort of team that Hasbrook was making, counted for infinitely more than he had done before. It was he, on the field, who executed the coach's plans; who sought out the weak spots of the other teams, and drove his plays against them; who seized upon the psychological moment for the actual making of a pass. For Hasbrook, of course, was turning to account, now, the reputation Brayton had built up; he was launching his running-attack from formations that all the football world had come to recognize as those associated with a long pass. Only the pass itself had become more a threat than an actual recourse.

But if it was Truesdell who, in the actual play was Hasbrook's deputy, it was still Stark himself, the captain, who was the focus, the rallying-point of the team. It was not at all that he asserted his nominal and titular authority as captain against Hasbrook; it was something infinitely more subtle—and, a wise observer might have thought, more dangerous—than that. What he was doing was really to live up to his captaincy, to make those boys of the team look to him as well as to the coach, to see in him, too, authority, to depend upon him.

There was no repetition of the old overwhelming scores that Brayton had been wont to pile up in the early games that year. But, on the other hand, no opponent came near, even, to crossing Brayton's goal-line. And the team, as a team, had gone far beyond any achievement of its past. It had a new rallying-point in Stark, a new center of strength, more definitely its own, more absolutely a thing within itself, than it had ever had before. And Hasbrook, baffled at first, disturbed, had acquiesced, finally, in a condition that he could hardly, in any case, have altered, had tried to dispose of the feeling that sometimes came to him that Stark was standing aloof, in some odd way.

Those were stirring days on that rough field. Every man came out as soon as he was free from classes; once the whole team was ready there was no let-up until it was so dark that even a whitewashed ball could not be followed. Then, after supper, there were long blackboard drills. Those sessions were for all the world like classroom recitations. Hasbrook would lecture, lay out a diagram in chalk, delimit zones, call upon this man and that to draw diagrams of plays. And it was while he was hammering at that, one night that, startlingly, shockingly, he and Stark came into open conflict and the smoldering fire in the captain blazed up.

"You're good enough to have a chance," Hasbrook said. "I don't know what it'll be—a fumble, an intercepted pass—something. Princeton beat Yale and Harvard both one year because an end scooped up a loose ball. They're too good for us in a straight game. But——"

"No!" The word seemed to be torn from Stark. He was on his feet; there was fire in his blue eyes at last. "We're going there to win, Doc!" He turned his back on Hasbrook, who stood still, amazed, silenced. "You hear me, you men! I'll have no man in that game who thinks we can lose! We've got to win that game. We've got to say we're going to win it. We've got to think we're going to win it—until we're all sure we're going to win it."

He turned back to Hasbrook then, faced him, trembling a little in his emotion, defiant, savage, indomitable. For a moment his eyes and Hasbrook's met and struggled. And it was Hasbrook who wavered.

That brief passage was the real crisis. From that moment Hasbrook's authority declined; his control of the team was lost. It was Stark now who ruled it, who fought to instil into the rest his own superb confidence, his unshakable conviction that Harvard, like all the long list of teams that had gone down before Brayton, must be beaten. Not a man on that eleven had played in a losing game since he had come to college; not one knew what even the fear of defeat was like.

THE whole college was out to see them off when they started for Cambridge. They were to ride on a local train to Minneapolis; the rest of the journey, however, was to be made on limited trains. There was a lower berth for each man; Stark and Hasbrook shared a stateroom. And Brayton teams, as a rule, had made their trips in day coaches; even when they had gone to play Nebraska thay had sat up all night, because the money even for tourist-sleeper berths was not to be had. But Harvard was paying for this trip, and expense was not to be considered.

It was new country that they saw as they traveled. They stared at the great lakeside plants as they rolled out of Chicago; the smooth, small farms of Indiana and Ohio made them smile—they who were used to rolling wheat-lands that stretched for miles.

And then in the morning they could look at New England from the car windows; white fences, stone walls, old houses standing amid orchards; new growth of woods ablaze with all the tints of autumn. So they came to Boston, and again there were reporters and photographers; for the first time they moved before a moving-picture camera and were told that the next day they might see themselves on the screen.

Gloriously, in taxicabs, they rode to the up-town hotel where they were to be quartered; from its windows they could see the Charles and the broad bridge that was, on Saturday, to be their Appian Way. Two to a room—twin beds—a bathroom for each pair of bedrooms! Even Stark was affected; he was silent, while the others exclaimed, but his eyes were eloquent and there was a movement in that hard line of his mouth. So envoys from the Goths might have looked at imperial Rome.

THEY came to Boston on a Thursday. On Friday they rode, already dressed, out to the stadium, practised on its smooth turf. The great concrete walls yawned in their faces as they looked up; here and there a little knot of spectators had gathered, but they were lost in the immensity of those towering rows of seats. The kickers were puzzled by the wind; it played strange pranks. And Truesdell, calling his signals, was appalled by the echoes. They were a little awed; only Stark held his mien of conqueror.

Hasbrook, exalted, his voice pitched low, talked to them after breakfast on Saturday. He told them what they might expect, warned them again of that deadly hidden-ball attack—an attack Harvard had used for years and could still use to the mystification of teams that had believed it solved. He told them of the reserve strength of the big team, of how, for every star on the field, another waited among the substitutes, reminded them of minor teams that had played themselves out, time and again, in the first half against Yale and Harvard and Princeton, only to be swept to crushing defeat in the second.

"You're sure you're going to win," he said. "So am I! And that's a fine thing—a great thing. But it's one thing to be sure and it's another to be overconfident. And that's what I'm afraid of. They'll make you fight, out there to-day, as you've never had to fight yet. They'll score on you—they'll smash some of your pet plays, that no one else has ever been able to stop. You've got to be ready for all that. I'm through. It's up to you now!"

They were very quiet as they waited about the hotel for the scanty luncheon they were to eat, or walked through near-by streets. The day was clear and cold; an east wind straightened out the flags; there was no cloud in the sky. Hasbrook walked out with Truesdell; Stark met them, saw the way the coach was talking and frowned. But he said nothing. His time was coming.

Then it had come. They were waiting. Dully, through doors and windows, came the din of the gathering crowd. Cheers rolled out like distant thunder on a summer night; sometimes a rhythm came into the murmur, so that they knew there was singing in the stands. And then one stood in the door, calling:

"All ready? Come on, then!"

Stark sprang up. He took a bright, new ball, turned to look at the team, led it out. A storm of cheers and of the clapping of hands greeted them; from the cheering section the long Harvard cheer rolled out for them. There were not a score of Brayton men in the stands, probably, yet for the Brayton team there was a host of supporters; half that crowd had come in the hope of seeing Harvard beaten, ready to cheer these invaders from the West.

Swiftly the team lined up and ran through signals; scattered, then, while MacGregor tried some kicks. Then Harvard came, and there was more cheering. The minutes passed; in the center of the field the officials gathered; Stark joined them, and shook hands with Metcalf, the Harvard captain. He called the fall of the coin that was tossed, chose to kick, against the wind. The referee said his last words as the stands fell silent; the teams lined up.

Then Swanson's boot crashed into the ball, and it soared straight down the field. and into the arms of Goode, the Harvard quarter. Sheehan missed his tackle squarely; it was Stark himself who brought the runner down on the twenty-yard line. And on the first play Harvard sounded the note of the game she meant to play, for Metcalf dropped back and kicked on the first down.

Stark and Truesdell were back; the ball

was the Brayton quarter's, but Metcalf had outkicked his ends in a sudden gust of wind, and Stark, shouting, cut across and took the ball. He flashed past the first Crimson player down the field, stopped dead a moment, streaked down the side line then, never a yard within it, in a blazing run that carried him down to Harvard's thirty-yard line before he was carried out of bounds.

Truesdell barked out his signal as he ran to his place; on the key-number Stark leaped forward, took the ball, went down as he struck the solid wall that blocked the opening off tackle. Two more rushes lost a yard; on the fourth down Carter's splendid attempt for a goal from the field went wide by a foot.

Stark was grimly exultant as they lined up. They had them! He'd been right. Harvard! Here, in the first minute, Harvard was fighting back a surging attack on its goal-line! That run of his had been like a score of others that he could remember; he had shaken off tacklers, put them out, as easily as ever he had done. Truesdell ought to have cut loose with his chance just now; no matter though—time enough!

He waited, crouching; saw Metcalf drop back and the Harvard ends spread out; raced back again to be ready for the kick. And the kick came—on first down again. But this time Metcalf gaged wind and distance; Stark catching the punt was dropped in his tracks on his thirty-yard line. Again the Harvard line stood firm against three running-plays, yielded a yard to Swanson's crashing plunge into the center, threw back a split-play off tackle, forced Stark across the field and out of bounds on an attempt to swing around the end. And Carter had to punt, did well against that wind but not so well that Harvard had not gained on the exchange. For now the ball was on Harvard's thirty-yard line, the luck of a roll had helped the kick.

And now Brayton, led by the nose, had to play a sort of football altogether new to it; Harvard kicked always on first down, hoarded every precious moment of that first quarter of the game in which the wind was at her back. And Metcalf, a punter of the school of Felton, gained on every exchange, judged his kicks perfectly, timed them for his ends, placed them as he pleased, began, as he worked down the field, to send the ball out of bounds. Stark, baffled, growing more sullen by the minute, was choked off; the opening for a long return that he had seized so brilliantly on that first punt never came to him again. The Harvard ends were down upon him if he had the ball to catch; more often, though, he had to watch it fall in touch beyond the side-line.

Time after time the Brayton backs crashed into that stone wall of the Harvard defense, wore themselves out in futile struggling in their own territory. Yet Truesdell's problem was a hard one. He could kick on first down, as Harvard was doing, and with that wind to throttle down Carter's distance present Harvard with five yards or ten as a free gift. He had been forced back too far to risk his aerial game; he shook his head fiercely when Stark called for a pass. That had been Hasbrook's last injunction. They must play safe, wait till, with the ending of the quarter, the wind would be their ally, not their foe.

BUT then on the last play, almost, of the quarter, when Carter stood on the five-yard line to kick out of danger, a Harvard line-man sifted through; the tips of his fingers grazed the ball as Carter hurried, got it away. And the ball floated crazily in the wind, went out of bounds on the twenty-five-yard line.

At once a new note came into Goode's voice, calling his signal. A savage thrill ran through the Brayton team; here was attack at last—attack such as they knew! Behind the line Stark, loose, his arms swinging, his eyes searching the Harvard backs, waited. He saw the ball go back, waited still a moment, made sure, he thought, of the play and cut through between Norton and Pulaski, split by the Harvard charge, to smash it. But what he had diagnosed as a swing around right end had been a split play off left tackle; he struggled to his feet to see the linesmen moving their sticks to mark a first down and to hear the thirsty roar of the Harvard stands.

Two more plays took the ball over for the touch-down: plays that left the Brayton team bewildered, baffled, mystified. But they knew, as they lined up, sullen and bitter on the goal-line waiting for the kick, what talk of that hidden-ball offense had meant! They had been the victims of a tactical device so perfectly conceived that for years, with the most trifling variations from season to season, it had served to baffle Harvard's opponents.

With the wind behind him still Stark chose to kick off. But now Harvard's tactics were changed. Instead of kicking, a running-attack, bewildering in its seeming variety, yet essentially simple, was employed to carry the ball down the field. Brayton fought, fought doggedly and hard. Yet, time after time, the ball was advanced. As the Brayton defense stiffened, the Harvard backs seemed to get more power into their sharp thrusts at the center, their slashing plays off tackle. And time after time, too, back and end were drawn in, fooled, lured into reenforcing the wrong spot, only to see an unprotected wing turned while they were hopelessly out of the play.

Then when they seemed to have solved the problem at last, when they had mastered the trick of waiting just long enough and not too long, Goode, feinting an end run, flung a forward pass, and an end slipped across for the second touch-down—two minutes before time was up for the first half. The goal was kicked gain. With half the game played Harvard led, fourteen to nothing.

Tight nerves were snapping now; frayed tempers were in evidence. Truesdell, crying with rage, abused them all impartially. Stark was like a smoldering fire.

If they could cut loose—if they could play their own game! What chance had they had? That one flash, at the very outset of the game—and in their pride, their exultation, they had let it go glimmering!

"Come on!" said Stark. "We'll kick again—and stop them! We can—we've got to——"

The ball sailed down the field; Stark and Sheehan struck Goode together five yards from his goal-line and almost carried him over with the fury of their impact. One rush was shattered at the line; Metcalf, smiling, cool, kicked on the second down. And this time little Truesdell going at full speed gathered the spinning ball to his chest and slipped through to the thirty-yard line.

On the signal the backs spread out, Carter fell back, Sheehan and MacGregor together went down and turned. Each was covered. But Carter, ball raised to throw, slipped under the tackle who was upon him, ran a few steps to one side, sent the ball spinning, in a long, lateral toss half-way across the field to Stark, who had already gathered speed.

Nothing could stop him in that rush. Sheehan spilled the last tackler in front just as Stark gave a Harvard back the heel of his hand; the stands went wild as the blue jersey with its gold stripes flashed across the line. Not since Mahan's day had such a run through a broken field been seen on that ground; the Harvard cheering section rose with the rest of the crowd to pay its tribute. And after the kick-off Brayton left the field, flushed with a new hope, trailing by seven points but in the game again—and with fifteen priceless minutes more to come with the wind behind its backs.

THERE had been fierce, wearing work in that long Harvard march down the field. They had lined up, weary and sore, on their own goal line to wait for the kick for goal. But that flash of their own old game, that proof that, given the chance, Harvard could be swept aside as easily as State or St. Joseph's, had banished weariness; they greeted Doc Hasbrook with laughs and jests; they were impatient as a Harvard trainer, lent to them, went among them. They were all right! A little water, a minute's rest—fine! Then to get back, to score again and again and again.

"Steady!" said Hasbrook. "Oh, Lord, Buck—don't go wild now! You've got them if you go slow—look at the way they did! But they can't go through you that way again—they've shot their bolt——"

Stark stared at him. His lip was cut and swollen; one eye was almost closed; a cut on his cheek, that had sent him in bleeding, had just been closed with plaster.

"Think I don't know that?" he said sullenly. "How'd we score—playing safe? Playing your new game? No—playing the way you taught us before you lost your nerve and let a lot of red shirts scare you——"

He turned away, contemptuous, scornful. And every man in that dressing-room saw him, saw him, and according to his nature, was impressed. Little Truesdell, shaking still with nervousness, aching in every bone and muscle, drove his nails into the palms of his hands in his effort to keep still; Mike Sheehan laughed his high-pitched, boyish laugh. Smiles ran about; they knew! Oh, they had learnt, out there.

NOW it was Harvard's turn to kick off into the wind. Carter carried the ball back to the twenty-yard line; Truesdell began to call his signal. And on the first key-number Stark straightened up.

"Signal!" he called. And: "Time out a minute! Truesdell——"

The quarter came back to him, bent as Stark kneeled on one knee.

"No more bucking!" said Stark. "They've got us stopped—we can't hit that line. Cut loose. Use twenty-nine—and the eleven series—get me?"

"Not here! Oh, Buck—down here—" Truesdell almost wailed his protest. "Doc said——"

"Shut up! Do what I tell you——"

Sheehan took Carter's pass on the first play, went down for a twelve-yard gain. But on the next down the play that had produced the touch-down in the first half was smashed to pieces; a gale of ironic laughter swept the stands as Stark, six yards behind the line of scrimmage, a yard from the side-line, turned and was literally thrown out of bounds. A forward pass was grounded; another brought disaster, swift and utter, for Goode intercepted it and was dragged down from behind on Brayton's three-yard line. Two plays saw the ball pushed over; again the goal was kicked.

And now, before the savage onslaught that followed Swanson's kick-off, the Brayton team collapsed. Incredulous, like some berserk viking in his rage, Stark saw its cohesion melt away. Time after time the Harvard backs streamed through vast holes; only Stark himself and little Truesdell kept their heads. It was not panic, it was sheer anger that brought about that rout. Every man blamed every other for the disaster that was piling up. Before the end of that third quarter Harvard had scored again; its last play was Metcalf's careless kick for goal, that went far astray to leave the score at twenty-seven to seven.

Fresh players came streaming across the field from the Harvard side; man after man of the 'varsity trotted off as his substitute appeared. But those men who were going out went off smiling, unwearied, ready to go on. Stark stared at them. His eyes were dull; his whole body was sagging. He knew the meaning of defeat now, its bitterness. Nothing could keep down the Harvard score now but the time that was left; he knew as he looked at the men who, half an hour before, had come back to that field as the Brayton team, that for all that they could do to stop it, the next period would see the completion of such a rout as had been the fate of team after team that he had helped to crush in the last three years.

There was no spirit in them save bitterness. Most of them stood, their heads hanging, waiting dumbly; Sheehan and Berger were quarreling like children; sullen looks were thrown at him.

And as Stark looked at them it was more than the taste of defeat that he knew. It was a knowledge that had filled him, suddenly, wonderfully, with a humility as deep as it was new, that dried the roof of his mouth, so that when he tried to speak he only croaked.

"You—you chaps—" They heard him, turned to him dully, stared at him as if they did not know him—he, about whom they had rallied, fought, swept on to victory; he, who had been their dependence; he who in the ultimate crisis of their lives had failed them, betrayed them, dragged them down with him into this pit of an incredible abasement.

"Oh—for God's sake!" he cried. "I—we're licked—I know— It was my fault—all my fault—thinking I knew more than Doc—my fault they got the chance to smash us that way. But—let's fight—let's keep on fighting—stop them—anyway——"

They stared; they must have heard. But only in Truesdell's eyes was there any answer. He could not fire them. They had ceased to care. One minute—and that was gone. If he had had time—five minutes even, but already the umpire was calling. Mechanically they heeded him, went to their positions. Stark hesitated, chose to kick off. But everything was against Brayton now. In this last quarter, again, the wind was Harvard's.

THEY waited, watching Swanson. It was no longer a team that started down under the ball as he kicked—eleven men, tired, beaten, forced to call upon bodies grown rebellious, indifferent, ran along, dully, apathetically.

Not quite. For in Stark the flame he had not been able to fling across the space between them for the kindling of the others still burned bright. He split that wedge of interference that had formed in front of the man with the ball; he kept his feet though man after man shouldered him, tried to put him out; snarling, teeth bared, he left the ground at last, brought down the runner. And as he rose he laughed.

"Come on—hold 'em!" he shouted. "Oh, Mike—on your toes, old boy! Get down, Pulaski! Mac, look out! Watch that end, yea!"

As the ball was snapped sheer instinct took him to the heart of the play; he bore the Harvard quarter-back just as he was about to pass the ball, dropped him behind the line. From far behind the line Truesdell's voice, shrill, rising above the clamor in the stands, came to them. And madly there was triumph in its note.

Slowly, sluggishly, some old, old spirit began to stir in them; it spread, like a slow fire, from man to man, like a fire creeping among wet leaves in autumn. It was Pulaski, lumbering, slow, strong as a giant, who, caught by that spreading flame, smashed through into the next play and dropped the runner for a loss. Then on the next down Harvard kicked and little Truesdell brought the ball back twenty yards.

"Come on—come on—everybody in it—here's our chance——"

Truesdell was crying his signal; Stark's voice rose, pleading, urging, begging. Command was gone from it; this was a new thing that he was doing. It was leadership, at last, that he was trusting. The blood was streaming from his cut cheek; some of the others were badly battered.

But on that first play there was a new lift to the charge of the forwards; Stark, smashing through, cleared the way for Swanson with the ball. Then Stark took it; Swanson again; Stark twice; Carter for a swinging run around the end; Truesdell himself, twisting clear, running low, to be brought down by the one man between him and the goal, while the stands went wild. And now as the team rushed after him it was clamoring.

"Signal!" MacGregor shrieked. "Oh, for God's sake, hurry!" came from Platt.

For now it was a Brayton team again that was fighting. And it was the team of Hasbrook's dream—such a team as never yet had followed Stark or any Brayton captain. It had been welded, fused, out there in the burning heat of that intolerable shame. It was Stark, now three times out of four, who carried the ball in that glorious, thrilling march down the field of a beaten team. But the whole team was with him, fighting, clearing his way, alive, vibrant, irresistible.

Every Harvard regular was back in that last furious struggle that took the ball across the line from the twenty-yard mark. But there was no stopping that newly disciplined thunderbolt. Stark himself carried the ball over, bored through the line, kept going with the weight of both teams on top of him, lay still, his wrists on the last white line, as the referee bent over him.

The shadows of the stand lay wide across the field as they reeled back, panting, exhausted, triumphant from that last smashing drive; Swanson, waiting for Truesdell lying flat to poise the ball, swayed a little. But his kick was true—fourteen points for Brayton.

"Come on!" Stark's voice rang out again. "They kick to us—let's go—let's go—twice more and we've got 'em—they didn't kick that last goal—come on——"

For him time had ceased to be. He caught the ball himself, went down in a welter of bodies within five yards, struggled up, raging. They lined up. The tumult in the stands died down, so that Truesdell's voice, squeaky, high-pitched, echoed far. But suddenly the shrill note of a whistle sliced the air; a great roar shook the field. And Stark, crouching, waiting, saw the forwards straighten up; still dazed, uncomprehending, watched the Harvard players gather, heard them cheering.

And he understood, at last. It was all over—they were beaten. The tears started in his eyes. But he shook himself, stood straight. The team gathered about him, gave a ragged cheer for those who had conquered them, stared about them vacantly.

Stark turned, nodded dully to something Metcalf said, shook his hand. And then he saw Doc Hasbrook running toward him. And through the grime upon his face, the plaster of mud and blood and tears, he flushed deep red.

"Oh, Doc!" he said. "I—I threw it away!"

Hasbrook's arm was about his shoulders.

"You!" He laughed, deep in his throat, joyously. "You did what I've been trying for four years to do. You built that team out there in that last quarter—a team, Buck! Oh, if they'd play us again to-morrow!"

Is There Something Wrong with Young America?

Nice People

The Author Holds the Mirror so that All the World May See how Our Youngsters are Deporting and Disporting Themselves. There's a Lesson for Parents in this Play

By Rachel Crothers

Published by courtesy of the author and the producer, Sam H. Harris

IS THE fact that bad manners are good form among the younger set in smart circles a dangerous tendency, or merely a passing phase to be treated humorously? Outraged clerics, college presidents and social reformers have had much to say about this, but the most interesting contribution to the argument has come from Rachel Crothers in her play, "Nice People."

The play opens in the drawing-room of *Theodora Gloucester's* home. She is twenty, daring, vivid, spoiled—the motherless daughter of a rich, indulgent father. *Teddy* is entertaining some friends and awaiting the arrival of *Scotty Wilbur* to even up the party.

TEDDY: Can you dance in that gown?

HALLIE: Of course. Just throw it over my arm. (*Throwing the train over her arm.*)

TEDDY: Oh, I didn't mean that. The back—where's a man going to put his hand?

HALLIE: Where he always does, of course. What's the matter with my back? (*Turning her back to the girls.*)

TEDDY: Nothing at all—it's doing very well this evening—so far as I can see.

EILEEN: That's the most economical kind of costume going, because you can wash your back; but when a man puts his old wet hand on this velvet, I nearly die. It simply ruins it.

HALLIE: Did you see Rena Maxwell's gown last night?

TEDDY: I did. It looked as if she were advertising her virtue.

EILEEN: And Lord knows she doesn't need to do that! I don't see why Rena doesn't stay at home altogether.

HALLIE: I don't, either. Nobody dances with her.

TEDDY: Of course no man wants to dance with her if she will wear corsets.

EILEEN: Old Ironsides, they call her.

TEDDY: Rena doesn't go in much for personal contact when she dances.

SCOTTY WILBUR *arrives, and after a few more drinks and a few words with* TEDDY'S *father and her* AUNT MARGARET, *the six young people start out at eleven-thirty to fight off boredom by dancing until breakfast-time. It doesn't occur to any of them to say good-night to* MRS. RAINSFORD *and* MR. GLOUCESTER.

MARGARET: The guests didn't even say good-night. It isn't done, I suppose.

HUBERT (*with an amused chuckle*): Nothing's being done that's too much trouble—you can count on that.

MARGARET: You think bad manners are amusing, then?

HUBERT: Not especially—no—just prevalent. It's the way things are. The manners of yesterday have nothing to do with the case. This is to-day. Why, these are the nicest kind of young people. Smart families—every one of them.

MARGARET: That's just it! That's what makes it so horrible. If they were common

Teddy in her New York home.

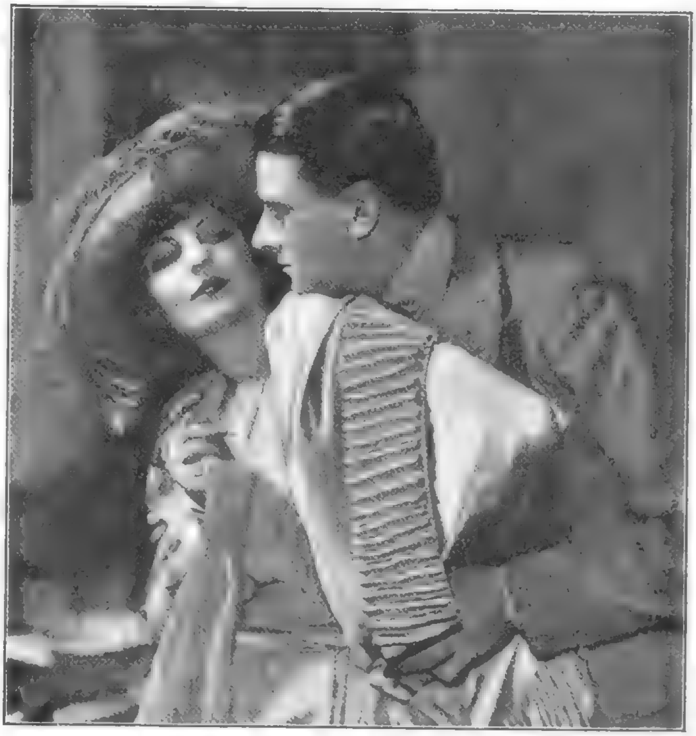
Teddy on her New England farm.

Teddy stops dancing with *Oliver* to greet *Scotty* on his entrance.

Teddy and her friends, late in the evening, talk about going somewhere to dance.

IN "NICE PEOPLE," Miss Crothers has written a delightful comedy of modern manners which provides food for reflection. Is there a tinge of sarcasm in her title? What will be the standards of conduct for America's future generations? Here is a timely problem for the "behaviorists" to work upon.

The above picture shows a group of apparently well-bred young people of New York's wealthy set planning to go somewhere at eleven o'clock at night, unchaperoned, to dance. They are (left to right) *Eileen Baxter-Jones* (Katherine Cornell), *Oliver Comstock* (Guy Milham), *Teddy Gloucester* (Francine Larrimore), *Trevor Leeds* (Edwin Hensley), *Hallie Livingston* (Tallulah Bankhead) and *Scotty Wilbur* (Hugh Huntley).



Hallie to *Scotty:* "All you need is money to make you perfect."

little upstarts and parvenus, it would be easy enough to understand. But nice people! What are their parents thinking of? Can't they see what it's going to do to the future generations?

HUBERT: Why, Margaret, there never was a generation that grew up that didn't think the next one was going to the dogs. They're freer — yes — because they are younger. But, by Jove, I actually believe they are safer than the bottled-up age I went through. They're perfectly open and aboveboard about it—and they're going to work out their own salvation in their own way—and come out all right. Frankly, I think you're awfully priggish. If you measure everything from your own conservative ideas of good form, of course, these youngsters seem a little raw. But this is their day.

MARGARET: Oh—their day! I'm not talking about superficial fashions and manners. The vital things of character don't belong to anybody's day—they're eternal and fundamental.

Aunt Margaret cannot view the behavior of *Teddy* and her friends with *Hubert's* easy complacency. Her mind is full of the tragedy of Europe and the loss of her son, and she feels that the sacrifices so gladly made are futile if civilization is to learn no lesson from them. "Why, in Heaven's name," she asks, "are sane, decent people allowing themselves and their children to wallow in food and clothes and pleasure at the expense of their breeding, their culture and their inheritances of wholesome American common sense?"

At this point *Teddy* comes into the room followed by *Scotty*. She is surprised to find *Aunt Margaret* and her father still up. They have decided to motor to some place farther out where it is not so crowded, and she has come back for a heavier coat. *Hubert* forbids her going.

TEDDY: Really, you're funny. I'll do nothing of the kind. I'm not going to disappoint these people. (*She starts to the door.*)

HUBERT: We won't say anything more about that. You're not going; that will do.

Teddy looks at him a moment, goes quickly to the desk, tears a small piece of paper, writes on it, folds it. Then—

TEDDY: Scotty, there's the telephone number I promised you. Good-night, Scotty! Please apologize to the others for me and tell them how extremely sorry I am that such a ridiculously embarrassing thing has happened. Good-night!

Scotty, a little embarrassed, bows his good-night and goes out.

TEDDY: What on earth do you mean, dad? How dare you treat me like that? You've never questioned my good taste before about where I go and what I do? Why this sudden——

HUBERT: I hope you've never done anything before that needed questioning.

TEDDY: Do you think we've never done this before? We do it all the time and then we come down-town and have breakfast at Childs'—and it's a lot of fun and I intend to keep on doing it—or anything else I want to do. I suppose I can thank you, Aunt Margaret, for this sudden interest in my affairs.

HUBERT: Teddy! I—I simply didn't know you were doing such things. It isn't necessary. There are plenty of other things to do for amusement.

TEDDY: I think I must be the judge of what I find amusing. I like this.

HUBERT: Then your judgment is not to be trusted.

TEDDY: Trusted? I don't know that yours is, father. You do a great many things I don't think altogether good taste. Mrs. Allister, for instance, is far from what I call good taste, and yet you seem to find her extremely amusing.

HUBERT (*helplessly, and much embarrassed*): Ah—go to bed!

TEDDY: I don't want to go to bed.

HUBERT: Well, you ought to.

TEDDY: Are you going to decide when I go to bed, too? You'd better put me on a leash, father. It will be easier for you.

HUBERT: You don't treat me with any respect.

TEDDY: I didn't know you wanted me to.

Hubert is no match for his daughter at repartee, and his sudden assumption of the rôle of stern parent collapsing he leaves the room. *Aunt Margaret* follows after an unsuccessful attempt to make *Teddy* see the light. Quickly *Teddy* goes to the telephone.

TEDDY: Hello—is there a young man down there? Ask him to come to the telephone. Hello—Scotty? I'll change my dress and be down in fifteen minutes. Telephone the others and ask them to wait for us. I know a peach of a place to go for breakfast. What? Yes, of course, he nearly choked. Stuff! I hope you don't think I'm afraid of dad. He was only showing off before Aunt Margaret—trying to make a noise like a father.

At seven o'clock the next evening, *Teddy* and *Scotty Wilbur* are picnicking in *Teddy's* summer cottage in the country. They got in through a window after *Teddy* had broken the glass with the heel of her slipper and sprung the catch.

TEDDY (*looking at her watch*): It's just a little after seven now. The others are all dressing for dinner and wondering where we are and cussing us out for giving them the slip. And father is pacing up and down foaming at the mouth.

SCOTTY: Will he raise the devil?

TEDDY: I hope so. It will do him good. This will show him that the stern-parent idea is extinct. Dad's really a peach. I was awfully disappointed in his kicking up such a row last night. I thought I had him too well trained for that.

SCOTTY: You can't expect him to be exactly calm about this, you know, old girl. This is going some, even for you.

TEDDY: Well, I want to make an impression—so he won't misbehave again. We can get back by ten. That will be a very chaste hour to stroll in and say we had a sweet, quiet day in the country.

SCOTTY: You're a peach. I adore you! See here, honey; there couldn't be a better time and place to tell me you'll marry me.

TEDDY: I'll tell you one thing—pos-i-tively—I feel very much more as if I might marry you than I ever did anybody else.

SCOTTY: That's wonderful!

TEDDY: I thought you'd appreciate it. I believe, Scotty, I like you because you haven't any character.

SCOTTY: Thanks.

TEDDY: See that queer light in the fire! Pretty! Isn't it weird and nice—shut up here with the whole world outside? I want to believe in love. It ought to be the most wonderful thing in the world. Do you know what would make us know that we loved each other? If we hadn't any money at all, just ourselves. Then we'd know.

SCOTTY (*his arms about her. He is rather the worse for whisky, of which he has been drinking very freely*): Couldn't be done——

Everybody's Magazine, November, 1921

TEDDY (*holding him off*): What if you knew this minute I didn't have a cent? What would you do?

SCOTTY: Don't say disagreeable things; we're happy.

TEDDY: Would you want to marry me then?

SCOTTY: What's the use talking moonshine? We know each other too well. I couldn't marry anybody on earth without money. Kiss me. (*Thickly.*)

TEDDY: No! No! No! You don't love me. This is horrible! I want to go. (*She pushes him away from her in disgust and he falls full-length on the bench on which they've been sitting.*)

Scotty has been verging on the maudlin for some time and in a few moments he is in a deep sleep.

There have been rumblings and faint flashes in the distance at intervals for the past half-hour, and now a terrific storm breaks in full fury. *Teddy* is horror-stricken. She tries to rouse *Scotty*, but fails. The door opens and a gust of wind and rain blows in. A flash of lightning reveals a young man wearing a rain-soaked top-coat and carrying an electric lantern.

TEDDY: Where did you come from?

BILLY: Up in the country further. I'm trying to get back to town. Never dreamed this storm was coming. She's a bird. Regular cloudburst. (*He lifts his lantern to see* TEDDY *better, then turns it on* SCOTTY.)

TEDDY: We—just came in for a few minutes ourselves and got caught. Got caught in the rain, I mean. This is my house.

BILLY: Oh, I see. You're not living here?

TEDDY (*tensely*): I've got to get to New York. I've got to! Do you think my car can make it? This storm has put everything on the blink for me.

BILLY: I s'pose there never was a storm that didn't spill the beans for somebody. But nothing ever seems half as bad in the morning.

TEDDY: This is once when everything is going to seem much worse in the morning.

BILLY: But you can make yourself pretty comfortable here for the night.

TEDDY: Oh, yes; I never was more comfortable in my life. I must say I'm glad you dropped in. The other member of the party doesn't seem to be adding much to the gaiety of nations.

BILLY: I'm glad to be a better talker than the other fellow for once.

TEDDY: It certainly is the chance of your life to sparkle. Well, go on—I was never so much in need of entertainment.

The very opportune stranger introduces himself as *Billy Wade.* He is a fine, clean, wholesome youth, and a new type to *Teddy.* This is his first taste of New York life, and he has found it "much more wonderful and much more rotten" than he expected. He tells *Ted,* naively, of his ten-thousand-dollar job, which an army friend got for him, and of some "awfully nice people" he has met. He is amazed at the casual way in which people get engaged, disengaged and married.

BILLY: The chasing's fun enough, but why get caught till you're sure you want to stay caught forever—till the whole game's over?

TEDDY: How can anybody be sure of that?

BILLY: They could be a darn sight more sure if they went at it as if it was a little something more than a try-out. What on earth do they think being married means?

TEDDY: And what on earth do you think it means?

BILLY: Oh—just the most important thing in the world—where everything starts, and where great things come from—if it's right—and where the worst things come from if it's wrong. What do *you* think it all means?

TEDDY: Nobody ever finds what he wants, anyway. And I think it's better to keep our dreams shut up tight and never let 'em out—so we won't be disappointed.

The storm does not abate, and *Billy* persuades *Teddy* to retire up-stairs. He offers to get her back to town at daylight, but *Teddy* refuses and says good-by. She prefers to remain unknown to him, and *Billy,* true to his promise, leaves in the morning before she comes down.

Scotty is remorseful for the unfortunate ending of their escapade and for his sodden condition the night before, but *Teddy* hastily and generously exonerates him of all blame. They are about to leave when *Aunt Margaret* and her father come in. *Hubert* regards *Ted* in silence for a moment. Before his fury can find words, *Teddy* begins:

"Now, father, I've done nothing on earth I'm ashamed of in the slightest degree." But *Hubert* has suddenly become the implacable father. He is outraged at the length to which her daring has led her and he insists that she marry *Scotty. Ted* refuses.

MARGARET: Be careful, dear; don't make another mistake with this serious thing.

TEDDY: I'm trying not to. Why do you ask me to marry him when I tell you I don't want to? *I don't love him that way,* I tell you. What has anything else got to do with it? How can you be so stupid and old-fashioned and afraid? Of course I've done a perfectly idiotic thing and I'm just as sorry as I can be. But what has that got to do with the rest of my life? What if people do talk and tell a few lies about me? I'm not going to sneak and do a trumped-up thing as though I were guilty. If you can't take me home now, dad, and hold up your head and say, "This is my daughter, and I trust her and know she hasn't done anything wrong," then I never want to go home at all.

HUBERT: And if you don't obey me—if you don't marry this boy, I don't *want* you to come home. Are you going to do it?

TEDDY: No!

Aunt Margaret stands by *Teddy* and stays on at the farm with her.

TEDDY: Isn't it a joke? Just because I'm a girl. Scotty's strutting about in town, of course, as usual—while I'm waiting here for my father to forgive me. Isn't it priceless? A girl can be alone all day with a man and nobody says a word—but one night in the most innocent accident, and she's done for. Lord, the things I could tell that have happened in the daytime! I admit I don't know much about the divine passion, but I know it hasn't hit me yet—and I'll never marry anybody till it does.

The next day her friends motor out from town to bring *Ted* bulletins and to find out what really happened. Many versions of the escapade have started on the rounds and they tell them all to her.

TEDDY: All the fish-stories you can possibly dig up won't be half as fishy as the truth. Scotty and I weren't alone here that night. (*They are amazed at this.*) I haven't even told Aunt Margaret this part of it. It's too much to expect even her generosity to believe. Scotty did have a drink or two and went to sleep—over there; and the storm raged—and the door opened—and a young man walked in—out of the nowhere—into the here—and we sat by the fire and talked—and talked—and talked. (*They laugh.*) You see—nobody *could* believe it.

Just then *Billy Wade* comes in. *Teddy* is dumfounded at his sudden reappearance.

TEDDY: I—I—I—I was just talking about you. (*To the others.*) *This* is the strange young man.

Billy corroborates *Ted's* story, but his testimony is received with amused incredulity.

Because of every one's placid assumption that she has compromised herself, *Ted* finally tells *Scotty* that since people won't believe her and her friends can't help her, she will marry him if he still wants her. *Scotty* does want her. But when she tells *Billy* her decision, he protests against it. *Ted* has her little farm and three thousand a year from her mother, and he urges her to stay there. "I could make this little farm sit up—if you'll help me. I'll put what I've got into it."

Billy assures *Ted* that his offer is not pure philanthropy. He had feared that his ten-thousand-dollar job was too good to be true, and having discovered that his employers are crooked, he has given it up.

TEDDY: If I try—*with all I've got*—if I work with my own *hands*—if I'm not a fool—do you think I can take care of myself?

BILLY: I *know* you can.

TEDDY: How wonderful of you to believe in me! I don't see how you can.

BILLY: I do. Believe in yourself. Don't be afraid. You're stronger now than you ever were in your life.

TEDDY: Oh—I'm afraid I'm doing something wild again.

BILLY: No, you're not. Pull yourself up. Pull yourself up high. You're going to *do* it.

TEDDY: I will—I will—*I will!*

Three months later, *Teddy, Aunt Margaret* and *Billy* are busy and happy on the farm. *Hubert* has not relented, but *Ted's* joy in her new adventure is so keen that even the estrangement from her father can not kill it.

Eileen comes out one afternoon and she and *Aunt Margaret* discuss the possibility of healing the breach between *Ted* and her father. *Aunt Margaret* is for letting things go on as they are.

She has seen a new *Ted*, a *Ted* who loves to do the clean, wholesome, outdoor things, develop from the sensation-seeking, ennuied girl of twenty who was cast off by her father three months ago.

Ted and *Billy* are meanwhile having their Saturday-afternoon respite from farm labor, and sprawled on the ground before the cottage they are discussing the future.

BILLY: There are things ahead we've got to look square in the face. Winter's coming, and it will be harder than the summer—lonelier for you. No friends to count on coming out—and you'll be bored.

TEDDY: Why, will you be bored?

BILLY: It doesn't matter about me.

TEDDY: And, how about you and me?

BILLY: That's it. That's the thing I've got to face. How can there be any you and me?

TEDDY: How can there be anything else? Billy, aren't we going to be together forever?

BILLY: Are we?

TEDDY: I can't imagine anything else—unless the world comes to an end, and then we'd go on together anyway.

BILLY: Do you mean you could—marry me?

TEDDY: Why, I've always taken that for granted since—well—since— I can't tell when it began—any more than I can think of it ending. Billy—look at me. Look at me! Isn't that the way you've always thought it was?

BILLY: I didn't dare. Oh, Teddy, I don't know whether you realize it yet—what it would really mean to give up all you've had—forever. To begin all over again—at the very bottom. What if you find you just can't get on without it. You'd hate me then.

TEDDY: Why do you think about what I've had? It's what we'll do that matters. And we'll never stop doing. The end is in us—not in anything else. It's in us, the magic is.

But money had always been the magic in *Ted's* life, and in spite of her brave words

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it was the power she best understood. She relied on it for positive results, and so decided to swallow her pride and go to her father, for *Billy's* sake. But she reckoned without *Billy*. She must choose between him and her money.

BILLY: I was a bloomin' idiot to think I meant any more to you than any of the others. I love you, but I know now I can't take the place of all you've had—and you want it, Ted, you want it.

TEDDY: Of course I do—and I want it for you. Why shouldn't you come into my world and be somebody in it?

BILLY: Because I despise it. I want you to be happy, Ted—and to get what you want—and what you think is worth while in the whole game. And I'm going to clear out so you'll get it quick.

And so he leaves her. Her experience with men has not prepared her for one who positively will not have her unless she detaches herself from her father's millions.

The three months since *Ted* outlawed herself have been hard on *Hubert*, and his love for her has at last overbalanced his wrath. On the day of her quarrel with *Billy* he comes to seek a reconciliation. *Ted* is standing forlornly where *Billy* left her when her father opens the gate. She flies to him sobbing.

TEDDY: Oh, daddy—daddy dear——

HUBERT (*hardly able to speak*): There's never been a day or an hour that I haven't wanted you back.

TEDDY: There's never been a day or an hour when I haven't wanted you.

HUBERT: Why didn't you come, dear?

TEDDY: How could I? I wanted you to come and tell me you trusted me.

HUBERT: My little girl! I'll make it up to you! I'm going to make you happier than you ever have been in your whole life, by giving you everything you want.

When *Hubert* hears that what she wants is *Billy* and that he won't have her except on his own terms, he is aghast. He immediately, though reluctantly, offers to buy him. *Ted* is sure, however, that *Billy* can't be bought. This is *Hubert's* first encounter with an emergency he cannot meet with a check, and he feels even more helpless and useless when *Ted* tells him that her old life has lost its savor and that with or without *Billy* she will remain on the farm. "Don't try to dispose of me. Let me do it myself," she tells him.

MARGARET: You must expect her to feel this way, Hubert. As I told you, she's had a great disappointment. Billy Wade is—well—you can't blame her for falling head over heels in love with him. If I were her age I'd do the same thing.

HUBERT: Well, let's have a look at the paragon. He must be rather a world-shaking character. At least, I'd like to pay him back for his work out here.

TEDDY: I'd like to see you try it.

Aunt Margaret brings *Billy* in.

HUBERT: You don't want my daughter, I understand?

BILLY: Is it necessary to discuss that?

TEDDY: Buy him, dad; buy him.

HUBERT: Have you made love to her—asked her to marry you, and then changed your mind? Have you the faintest idea of the insufferable impertinence of that?

BILLY: Theodora has decided she wants her money, and I can't marry her with that, Mr. Gloucester.

HUBERT: What!

TEDDY: Billy—when you thought I didn't have any, you loved me, and I know you love me now. It's the money, dad. He won't take me with it, so I give it up—absolutely—everything you could possibly give me.

HUBERT: Steady, Ted. You're talking very big.

TEDDY: Billy, I'm just the way I was an hour ago—and I love you better than anything in the world. Will you marry me?

HUBERT: *My God!*

MARGARET: You ask him to, Hubert. Do all you can to hold him.

HUBERT: I suppose I'm turned out—am I—with my money? Is there anything I could do—give it away—or anything to induce you to accept me as a father-in-law?

TEDDY: You leave me alone with him a minute, dad, and I'll see what I can do for you. (*Hubert and Margaret leave.*) Billy—will you marry me?

BILLY: Ted—I know you've flirted an awful lot, but you're the only girl in my life—and if you're fooling me, I'll kill you.

TEDDY (*putting her arms around his neck*): Go on, dear—I love that.

The Bag That Grinned

By

Wilbur S. Boyer

and

Bertram Lebhar

A Novelette that Deals with the Disappearance of a Large Sum of Money, and the Ingenious Solution of the Mystery by a Woman Lawyer

Illustration by C. Clyde Squires

THE violent death of Dow Hagadorn, right outside the premises of the First National Bank of Helderberg, was the second shock that came to Judson Parker, cashier, teller and bookkeeper of that institution, on the morning of Tuesday, September 14, 1920. He had sustained the first shock less than sixty seconds before, when Hagadorn, usually the most methodical and meticulously cautious of men, had smashed a long-established precedent.

The First National Bank of Helderberg, its only bank, stands on Main Street opposite the end of Railroad Avenue. If Railroad Avenue kept right on going, it would shove the First National out into a hop field with ridiculous ease; for the one-story brick building is just big enough for a back room where the president can discuss finances with the big men of the valley, and a front room for ordinary folk, with a vault and a cage for the cashier-teller-bookkeeper.

Judson Parker had occupied that cage for fifteen years. No problems in other people's finances had he to solve. When not actually engaged in taking in or pushing out other people's money, he could sit and read detective stories or look out of the bank's one front window.

Through that window he could get a view of life, all of life that a small town off the main line between Albany and Buffalo could boast; a lumbering hay-rigging with its huge pile of strong-smelling green hops on the way to the kiln, a jogging team before a tough-springed farm-wagon loaded with hop-pickers, a flivver or two of modest shopkeepers, and a shining car of some nabob, while on the narrow sidewalks a sprinkling of pedestrians sauntered along with the town's characteristic gait, whether on business or pleasure bent.

Through that window every Tuesday morning at precisely ten o'clock Judson Parker for the past fifteen years had observed the approach of the long, lanky figure of Dow Hagadorn, bookkeeper of Bloodgood, Inc., jogging along Railroad Avenue with an old black bag in his right hand on his way to the bank to cash the check for the firm's weekly pay-roll.

Every Tuesday morning within more recent years the sight of Dow, stoop-shouldered and emaciated, with his shiny, painfully pressed green-black suit, his well-brushed veteran of a hat, with his faithful dog-step and his faithful dog-face, nose never turning to right or left, but always on the scent of dull duty, had stirred the same mental reactions within Parker—discontent with fortune and the world in general. For in Dow the bank clerk saw a reflection of himself: handler of other people's money for a stipend that condemned him to the dull and drab for life; each with one little room in some one else's house to call home; each taken for granted by his respective employer as a cog that could not slip.

Every Tuesday morning for the past fifteen years Jud and Dow, on the latter's arrival at the bank, had gone through the same formula, rarely deviating from it by as much as an interpolated sentence.

"Morning, Jud!"

"Morning, Dow!"

"How's the financial world!"

"So-so, as far as I know. How's hops?"

"Can't complain, far as I know."

Then the thrusting of the check of Bloodgood, Inc., through the teller's barred window, and the bank-clerk's query, "How'll you have it?" to which Dow would invariably respond, "Here; I've got it all written out for you," and hand him a slip of yellow paper—always a yellow slip—on which was written a column of figures in Hagadorn's copperplate hand. Then the rapid counting-out of the cash by Parker and the slower recount by the ultracautious Dow, whose faded but infallible eyes had already made a mental inventory of the bills as they passed through the teller's hands. After which, Hagadorn would fish out his bunch of keys with an ostentatious flourish inspired by his one vanity, pride in the possession of the gold-handled knife attached to the key-ring—a souvenir of Spence Bloodgood's wedding-dinner. He would unlock the battered black bag, deposit the packages of bank-notes and rolls of coin therein, picking up each package and roll separately from the glass slab. He would relock the bag, testing the result carefully before he restored his bunch of keys to his pocket; then:

"Morning, Jud!"

"Morning, Dow!"

And a few seconds later Judson Parker through the bank's front window would gaze half pityingly, half contemptuously on the long, lean figure of Dow Hagadorn, as the man who always reminded him so unpleasantly of himself jogged along Railroad Avenue back to his monotonous grind in Bloodgood, Inc.'s auditing department.

Thus it had been for years; but on this particular morning the precedent had been broken. Dow had not run true to form. In the first place, he had arrived at the bank ten minutes late. In the second place, after the customary salutations and the presentation of the check and the accompanying slip of yellow paper, Dow had done something so unexpected that it had quite taken Parker's breath away.

"Just hold that cash a minute, Jud!" he had explained. "I'll be right back." And without a further word of explanation he had rushed out of the bank.

It was while Parker was pondering over this queer behavior on the part of Dow Hagadorn that he had received his second shock. He saw Dow struck down, in the act of crossing Main Street, by a big maroon limousine car.

IT WAS hop-picking time, Helderberg's busy season, when the Gipsies of labor from Troy and Albany, from Rochester and Buffalo, from Binghamton and New York, and uneasy alleys between, gravitated toward the hop fields for easy money and a loose, devil-may-care life. Main Street was thronged with groups of these nomads who, with the happy-go-lucky custom of their class, were taking a day off, and an instant after the accident the inert figure in the center of the road was hidden from Parker's view by a crowd of almost metropolitan proportions.

They carried Dow into Stark's drug store, right across the street from the bank. Parker stood anxiously watching the crowd in front of the door for a few minutes, yearning to run over and ascertain how badly his friend was hurt, but hesitating to leave his post; for Scott Barnes, the First National's president, was out making a business call and there would be nobody to guard the bank.

At length, however, solicitude not unmixed with curiosity triumphed. Judson shut the cash-drawer, slammed the vault door and bolted for the street. Banking methods in Helderberg were primitive, though expeditious and reasonably efficacious.

Ben Cummings, Helderberg's brawny chief of police, had just arrived on the scene, and by the weight of his bulk and authority was forging his way through the throng on the sidewalk. Traveling in his wake, Parker reached the inside of the drug store.

There, over the heads of the stooping bystanders, he could see the druggist and "Doc" Miller working over the form stretched on the tiled floor.

"Who is it?" Cummings asked.

"It *was* Dow Hagadorn," Doc Miller replied with significant emphasis. "The poor fellow's done for, Chief—broken neck. It's a case for the coroner."

"Dow Hagadorn—the man who carried the cash for Bloodgood, Inc., eh!" Cummings muttered thoughtfully. "How did it happen?"

"Struck by that car outside," the druggist volunteered. "I saw him hit with my own eyes. He was comin' across the street from the bank. Guess he'd just been drawin' the cash for the pay-roll, for he had that old black bag in his hand, which he always totes every Tuesday, and——"

"Where's the bag?" Cummings broke in abruptly, his professional instincts seizing on that detail.

There was no immediate answer. The drug-store proprietor glanced inquiringly about him, his features gradually assuming an expression of mingled wonder and concern.

"That's right!" he exclaimed excitedly. "The bag— Where is it? Who's seen it? I don't remember seein' anybody bring it in, but I'm quite sure he had it in his hand at the time he was hit."

From that moment on, interest in this new development overshadowed the tragedy itself. The violent death of the bookkeeper of Bloodgood, Inc., the biggest hop-growers in the Schoharie Valley, was a sensational incident, but the larceny of Bloodgood, Inc.'s weekly pay-bag would be an event to thrill all Helderberg. And within five minutes after the matter had been brought to Chief Cummings' attention, there was little doubt but that the late Dow Hagadorn's familiar black bag had been stolen. Prompt but thorough investigation brought to light the fact that not only was it not to be found inside the drug store, but that there was no trace of it on the street in the vicinity of the scene of the accident or in the limousine which had done for Dow.

"Looks as though some mean hound must have picked it up and made off with it right after the poor fellow was hit," was the conclusion Cummings presently arrived at. He entered the First National Bank building and stepped briskly up to the teller's window. Judson Parker was back at his post by that time. After listening silently to the talk about the missing bag, he had returned to the bank, his brow corrugated in thought and an unusual gleam in his eyes.

"Found it, Chief?" the bank employee asked.

"Not yet," said Cummings. "Looks as though some bird's made a good haul this time. Reckon I've got a regular job ahead of me. How much was in the bag, Jud?"

Parker hesitated for a brief moment; then met the other's gaze steadily.

"Twenty thousand, one hundred and sixty dollars and fifty-four cents," he answered.

IN MOMENTS of introspection, which were not infrequent with him, Judson Parker had often wondered whether such humble cogs in the world of finance as Dow Hagadorn and himself were kept from slipping by an inherent sense of honesty or a lack of nerve and initiative. Now, as far as he was concerned, the question was answered. Recent developments had made it quite clear that the only reason he had remained straight throughout his fifteen years in the banking business was that never before had an opportunity presented itself which could be grasped by the forelock with a minimum of risk.

A man who is filling the position of cashier, teller and bookkeeper combined in a small-town bank has, of course, many opportunities to steal. But in nearly every instance the danger of a come-back is too great to make the game worth while, unless one is in such desperate straits as to be prepared to dare the consequences. Parker had never been in desperate straits, and, lacking that inspiration to become a criminal, had hitherto remained an apparently thoroughly reliable cog. He was not in desperate straits now; but a situation had arisen which seemed to offer such excellent chances of his being able to swerve from the straight and narrow path without unpleasant consequences that, even with his modicum of nerve, he was tempted.

When Hagadorn, for some unknown reason, had interrupted the transaction of cashing Bloodgood, Inc.'s weekly pay-roll check by running out of the bank, leaving the check in the cashier's hands, there had been nobody else in the building. That was not unusual, for Helderberg's business required no line of waiting depositors. A few big exchanges of cash—big for Helderberg—the usual nine-o'-clock and two-thirty visits of local shopkeepers, the rest carried on by mail, constituted the First National's activities. Even Scott Barnes, the president, had been out at the time. Consequently there had been no eye-witness to the fact that Bloodgood, Inc.'s bookkeeper had not received the money in exchange for the check when he departed from the bank. Nevertheless, the thought of cashing in on the situation, the idea of turning it in any way to his personal advantage, had not entered Judson Parker's head at the moment. He had taken it for granted, of course, that Dow would be back presently for the money.

EVEN when he had seen Dow struck down by the automobile outside the bank, and when he had gone across the street to Stark's drug store and learned that the accident had proved fatal, the possibility of making capital of the tragedy had not at once occurred to Parker. It was not until he had heard Stark make the remark about the black bag which led to the discovery that it was mysteriously missing that there had come suddenly to the cashier of the First National the most daring thought that had ever entered his brain.

It was an idea so startlingly bold that at first he had hesitated about carrying it out. He had stood silently by while the suggestion was made that the missing bag contained Bloodgood, Inc.'s pay-roll money. He had gone unobtrusively back to his cage in the bank without saying a word to clear up that misapprehension. But not until Chief Cummings had put to him the question as to how much was in the bag had Judson definitely decided to go through with the thing, and made the categorical response which automatically turned him into a criminal.

He was aghast now at the temerity of his answer to the chief of police. In fact, the instant the words were out of his mouth he regretted them and would have given a deal to be able to recall them. But Cummings departed a moment later and the die was cast.

Three or four depositors dropped in on business presently. Willingly would they have remained to gossip, but the cashier excused himself, turned to the dusty, improvised shelves behind him and took down a box-file two years old, over which he feigned to be busy. It had the desired effect and he found himself alone.

Replacing the file, he came back to his stool, where he sat staring down at the check for $20,160.54 drawn by Bloodgood, Inc., and stamped "Paid."

Twenty thousand dollars!

He looked toward the rear of the bank. There was where the great men gathered to talk of thousands as if they were pennies. in that back room behind the partition that rose half wood for six feet, then finished in glass to the ceiling, so that nothing but a mumble ever reached the ears of the man who handled the cash; while Judson on his high stool would watch the tops of those heads and ask Fate why Judson Parker had not the luck to demand a seat with those gods.

Had Spencer Bloodgood worked more hours per day than Judson Parker? If he, Judson, had been given a thousand dollars a year more for the past fifteen years, which would have been no more than what was right, it would not have been so far from the amount of Spencer Bloodgood's check. Instead, he had been doled out just as small an emolument as the directors of the First National—Spencer dominating—could offer without hurting their consciences; and their consciences were calloused.

And the wealth of Spencer Bloodgood was increasing with leaps and bounds. While weaker men, thrown into panic by the unexpected Eighteenth Amendment, had hurried to get out of the hop industry before the anticipated collapse, this hard-headed, unsentimental man of vision had gathered together a few kindred spirits and bought up or secured long leaseholds on all the hop fields that were offered. And his obliging neighbors unloaded upon him and laughed up their sleeves. Now, under Prohibition, the price of hops was higher than it had been in the history of hops since the halcyon days back in the early 'Nineties when the English crop failed and the humble hop touched a dollar a pound.

The result of this development was that whereas in the days of many breweries there had been a hundred men in the Helderberg region who were recognized as moderately well-off, now there were less than five families that were rich and growing richer because they had foreseen that people would make home brew; while the others had dropped back into the crowd. It caused bitterness in the valley, and Judson was one of the bitterest. It was not difficult for the cashier to work himself up into righteous indignation over the subject.

"Nobody will be particularly sorry for old Bloodgood," he mused sardonically.

Twenty thousand! The pleasures of Helderberg were not riotous: Church socials, a strawberry festival or two, a patent-medicine show, ball games with other towns, a moving picture in the high school once a week. Any one who stayed up after ten o'clock was looked at askance. What could one do with twenty thousand dollars? Judson knew the place he would go to, where he would sleep all day and live at night! No dark, deserted streets after sundown would echo to his footfalls again, no lonely woods or silent fields. He would not care if he never saw another blade of grass. His choice would be every night a show with beautiful women in it and lilting music; and after the show a real feast with dancing between courses—he'd learn how. It would not be hard with such a fortune in his pocket to find a lovely companion to accompany him—perhaps two or three. And eat? No more salt pork or eggs or chicken for him. He had had enough of such fare to last him a lifetime. There was other food, he knew, that he had never tasted, and twenty thousand would bring its delights to his expectant palate. He smacked his lips in anticipation of all the pleasures that money would buy.

IT WAS not until the middle of that afternoon that Parker's air castles were sent toppling by a startling thought that came to him. The missing bag might turn up later, still locked and with nothing in it! If that happened, the lie that he had told Ben Cummings would be exposed. In the face of such conclusive evidence, he would have to admit that Dow Hagadorn had left without the money.

A cold sweat dampened his brow. He pushed the check from him with a trembling hand. What a fool he had been to take it for granted that the bag had permanently disappeared, when common sense might have suggested that the odds were all in favor of the contingency he now foresaw!

"Phew!" he muttered. "What a narrow escape!" Of course it was out of the question to go through with the thing, now that he realized the peril with which his rashly conceived plan was fraught. Thank heavens it was not too late! If he called up Bloodgood, Inc. immediately—before that confounded bag had a chance to bear mute testimony against him—and told them of Dow's action and that the money was at the bank, waiting to be handed over to them, he might still escape the consequences of his indiscretion. It might be somewhat awkward to explain why he had lied to the chief of police; but, at all events, they could not send him to jail for that. Perhaps he might even be successful in making everybody—except Ben Cummings—believe that the latter had misunderstood him.

Parker's hand reached for the desk telephone at his elbow, but he did not use the instrument. A motor-car had stopped in front of the bank and in strode Chief Cummings, Scott Barnes, the president of the First National, and Spencer Bloodgood.

"Well, Jud, we've got the bag," announced the chief of police.

"I—is that so?" the cashier stammered, sparring for time.

"Yep. Some kids found it at morning recess in the sheds behind the Dutch Reformed church, when they were playing cops and robbers. Of course there isn't a cent in it. It had been ripped open from end to end."

"Ripped open!" Judson Parker echoed sharply.

"Of course. That was the only way the thief could get at the money, being as how the bag was locked and he didn't have the key," the police official explained. "What we're here for, now, Jud, is to have you satisfy Mr. Bloodgood that the cash was in the bag. He seems kind o' unwilling to take my word for it."

"Not at all," the hop-grower put in pompously. "There isn't much room for doubt, in the circumstances, but I'm a business man and I want to make absolutely sure." He turned to the cashier with that air of arrogance which always made the latter yearn to grab him by the throat. "Parker," he said, "did Dow Hagadorn cash a check here this morning for about twenty thousand?"

"Yes, sir," answered Judson. "Here's the voucher." And he exhibited the canceled check.

"Thank you," snapped Bloodgood, turning his back upon the cashier. "That's all, gentlemen. I'm satisfied. Now we must take steps to find the person who stole the bag."

When the others had passed out, the bank president paused at Jud's wicket long enough for a brief commentary upon the stirring events of the morning, then retired to his sanctum in the rear. Judson Parker went at once into the vault. This one vault served the double duty of holding the bank's ready cash and acting as a safe deposit for the few men of wealth in town who had papers and securities requiring better protection than an ordinary office safe. Not all of the compartments set aside for this latter purpose were occupied. Choosing one of the larger of these, the cashier placed therein $20,160.54 in denominations precisely as called for by Dow Hagadorn's yellow slip.

In case suspicion should be turned in his direction later, he was satisfied that he had chosen the last place where any one would think of looking for the missing money. But, of course, there was no danger of his being suspected. Recent developments had entirely eradicated his earlier misgivings. As soon as he had learned that Dow Hagadorn's dilapidated old bag had come to light, slashed open by some dishonest hand, at present unknown, he had realized that it would be safe to go through with the thing. Even if the thief were caught later—the person who had made off with the bag—there would be no danger. Nobody would believe the latter's story that the purloined bag was empty.

WHEN the bank closed at three, Parker could not resist the desire to keep his eye on every move in the game in which he found himself an interested party. He had crossed the Rubicon now; there was no going back. His curiosity drew him to police headquarters, a room in the Phœnix Block—three two-story buildings under one roof on Main Street. For ten months in the year Ben Cummings was town constable, assuming the more illustrious title of chief of police when the advent of hop-picking made it necessary to swear in a few deputies to keep one end of the town from being torn up and thrown into the Schoharie Creek while Ben was at the other end. As chief of police he was head of the detective bureau—consisting of himself; and, as head of the detective bureau, he was engaged now in making a circumspect study of the only bit of evidence thus far brought to light in the most important case that had ever claimed his professional attention.

He sat at a battered desk, gazing through a magnifying glass at the slit in the late Dow Hagadorn's equally battered bag, and so preoccupied was he that he did not hear the entry of his visitor.

"Sherlock Holmes stuff, eh, Ben?" Parker remarked almost jauntily.

"Hello, Jud!" said Cummings cordially. "Glad you dropped in. Take a look at this witness. With all your detective-story readin' you ought to be able to dope out a clue. See if it tells you the same story it has just told me."

Somewhat uneasily Parker picked up the bag. The suggestion of its being sentient was not a pleasant one to him. He knew too well what story it would tell had it the power of speech, and he found himself suddenly possessed with a violent dislike for the ugly leather thing.

His perturbation was increased by a queer discovery. For years he had seen that bag in Dow Hagadorn's hand, but this was the first time he had ever held it in his own hand or gazed upon it at such close quarters. He noticed that there were stains in the leather, and that in juxtaposition with the knife-slash they conveyed an uncanny suggestion of a human face—the stains forming the eyes and nose, and the slit the mouth. But what particularly caused a creepy sensation to run up and down Judson Parker's spine was the fact that this grinning countenance bore a weird resemblance to the late Dow Hagadorn.

For a while he stood staring fascinatedly at the bag which grinned at him; then, breaking the spell, deposited it silently on Cummings' desk, taking care that the side which had caused him such an unpleasant reaction was turned from him.

"Can't make anything of it, eh?" the chief of police chuckled. "Well, it tells a story all right. Just as you came in, Jud, it was giving me a line on the identity of the bird who stole the money."

"What do you mean?" the cashier demanded sharply. "I—you're talking nonsense, Ben."

"Am I? Well, maybe I am; but we shall see. I ain't sure yet. It's quite possible that you may have the laugh on me after all; but if that bag tells anything, it says pretty plainly that the man we've got to look for in connection with this robbery is a box-tender in a hop-yard."

Parker gave vent to a laugh into which went the relief he inwardly felt.

"Oh, come, now, Ben," he said banteringly; "that's hard to swallow."

"Is it? See here. The grain in the cut leather is pushed inward for the width of nearly an inch. That was where a big knife went in. All the rest of the way the grain pulls out. To cut heavy leather like that, a knife must make a drawin' motion like a saw. A small knife would be drawn in and out several times. This was made with one swipe—grain all one way, not a waver in the line—just like drawin' with a pencil. See—if I strike a line across this sheet of paper with one stroke and then make a second line, pausin' in two or three places, no matter how carefully I do it, you can see under the glass where I paused each time in that second line. To make that slidin' motion with one stroke, the knife must have been bigger than the biggest jack-knife you ever saw, and it was mighty sharp, too."

"A razor," suggested Parker.

"Too light for this job. It's more likely to be a box-tender's knife."

Hop vines are grown on poles sixteen or eighteen feet high and on cord strung between the poles. The box-tender is the man who cuts the tough vines near the foot of the pole and on the strings leading to neighboring poles. Then he pulls the pole out of the ground—it takes a husky to do it—and lays the upper end on the ridgepole of the box into which the pickers drop the hops as they strip them from the vines.

"But there are hundreds of box-tenders in the valley," objected the cashier.

"How many of them took to-day off?" asked Helderberg's detective shrewdly. "I'll find that out from the yard-masters. I can reach some yards by 'phone. The others I'll visit in my flivver. I bet I get in touch with every one before dark. And one more point: How many box-tenders did you ever see carryin' those big knives? Most of those tools belong to the yard-owners and are left at night stuck in the ridge-pole of a hop-box in the field. I'll find the box-tender who took a day off, and who carried his own knife. This haul wasn't premeditated; so the obvious is the most likely."

Judson Parker hoped fervently that Ben Cummings's deductions were wrong. Not that he had anything to fear from the man who had picked up the bag, but he was not yet calloused to the idea of fastening the theft upon some one else.

THAT evening the chief of police met Parker and Bill Stark by appointment and journeyed on foot to hop-house number 7 of Bloodgood, Inc. The heavy narcotic odor of the drying hops scented the air long before the trio reached the building; and the same air carried the lively scrape of a fiddle, the shuffle of feet and the sound of happy revelers' voices.

The visitors stood in the open doorway and surveyed the scene. One-half of the lower story was a barn floor the full length of the building. To the left, four doors, with a small pane of glass for a peep within, indicated the four stove-rooms below the kilns. The floor of these kilns, a story above, was a wooden grill covered with burlap. Wagons loaded with bags of freshly picked hops would drive in on the main floor during the day; the bags would be tossed through the traps to the floor above and emptied on the burlap in the kilns, and at night the drier would start roaring fires of hickory in the stoves below and keep them going until two or three o'clock in the morning, once in a while visiting a kiln to turn over the hops with a burlap-covered fork as big as a window-screen.

The job would be a lonesome one were it not for the custom of hop-pickers to take advantage of the fact that some one had to stand watch after nine o'clock. They would come to the hop-house to keep the drier company, and quite natural was it for some one to bring a fiddle. An unsocial creature would be the drier who did not welcome a crowd on his inviting main floor for a hop-dance.

This night, four lanterns made but slight impression on the gloom of the hundred feet between doors. The fiddler scraped away, seated on the stairs leading to the loft, the drier on a chair near by, smoking his pipe, while sixteen couples were in the throes of a round dance.

"All 'e men left!" sang the fiddler, beating time with his feet. "Ketch on to your bread-hooks! Swing your honey! Sashay all!"

"Jud," said Cummings, in a low tone, "the man with his own vine-knife is here. He made it out of an old scythe-end—ground down the larger end into a spike, stuck the spike into five inches of an ax-helve and made a sheath for it. See if you can spot him."

For ten minutes Parker scrutinized every male dancer in the building and then laughed with relief.

"This time you fell down, Ben," said he.

Ben grinned.

"Well, I'm glad you can't pick him," said he. "It shows that every job needs experience. Look at the fiddler."

"Sweeties in the center!" sang the musician.

Jud saw the sheepskin sheath at the man's belt and found himself wishing the fellow a thousand miles away.

"You don't want to accuse the wrong man," said he dubiously.

"Leave that to me, you and Stark; follow any lead I make."

THE chief crossed in front of the fiddler, stood at the glass peep-hole in a fire-room door as though contemplating the red-hot stoves within, and waited until the music ceased.

"May I speak to you a minute outside, Mr. Brown?" he requested.

Brown laid his violin on the stairs without a word and accompanied the chief of police.

"Mr. Brown," began Cummings, when they were joined by Judson Parker and the druggist, "you are under arrest for stealin' a bag with money in it near the corner of Railroad Avenue and Main Street this morning when its owner was struck down by an auto."

"Sorry to disappoint you," said the fiddler, "but I don't know anything about a bag."

"Think again," said Cummings. "Let me introduce you to Mr. Stark, the druggist. The window of his store overlooks that corner."

He spoke significantly, and Stark was quick-witted enough to smile knowingly at the accused and nod his head several times affirmatively.

"We have another way of spottin' the thief," went on the detective of Helderberg, "and I tell you straight that there is just one slim chance of your gettin' away with an alibi. The bag was slit open, the money removed, and the bag left in the sheds of the Reformed church. Under the microscope we find that the slit could be made by only one instrument: a knife about seven inches long made from the end of a scythe. If the knife at your belt does not answer that description, don't confess, Mr. Frank Brown."

Ben held out his hand for the knife.

Frank Brown was a husky specimen with a week's growth on his face. The set of his shoulders, the tip of his chin and the glint in his eye gave him a cool, daredevil bearing; but there was an air about him that spoke of association with people of refinement at some time in his life. Ben's words gave him a momentary start, but quickly he recovered himself.

"All right," said he; "there's the knife. But any one who tells you there was money in that bag is spoofing you."

"That don't go!" snapped Cummings. "You know there was money in it."

"Not when I got it," insisted Brown.

"Have you any witness to that fact?" demanded Ben ironically.

"No—worse luck!" admitted the box-tender. "How much was supposed to be there?"

"Cut the comedy," said Cummings. "This is Mr. Parker, cashier of the bank. He had just cashed a check for Dow for twenty thousand dollars and saw him put the money in that bag."

"Twenty thou— Say!" Brown stuck his hand in his pockets and turned his gaze on Jud. "What's your game?" he demanded.

Jud grinned.

"He has his nerve with him," he said tolerantly.

"He'll need it," put in the chief of police sardonically. "Come on, young man. Let's be movin'."

"Going through with it, eh?" said Brown, shrugging. "Well, all right. I'll be the goat. But let me tell you one thing: No rube cop would be marching me to the lockup if there'd been twenty thousand bucks in that old bag; I'd be headed south by this time at eighty miles an hour."

"A very good line," said Ben sarcastically. "But if *I* were pullin' such a stunt, I'd hang around so as not to arouse suspicion, as long as I believed there was no way of connecting me with the loss of the money. Wouldn't you, Jud?"

"I suppose I would," responded the cashier, with the cool indifference of one passing upon a purely academic question.

And later, when Brown was secured in the village lockup, Parker found himself considering the case against the box-tender with considerable interest.

"Say, Ben," he began, when the pair reached the street, "you can't prove that the slash was made with the end of a scythe."

Ben laughed heartily.

"Stark couldn't identify Brown, either. But you saw how the two bluffs worked. Before witnesses Brown has admitted taking the bag."

"What steps will you take now to get hold of the money?"

"If Brown will 'fess up what he did with it, he'll get off comparatively easy."

The cashier shook his head.

"The man won't confess," he gave as his opinion. "He'll stick to his story, serve his term and have the money when he comes out."

"Why are you so sure we won't get the money?"

"I'm judgin' character, as you did. You said that if you were the thief, you'd hang around to allay suspicion; now, *I'd* have the money when I came out."

Boldness was not what prompted the cashier's suggestion, but merely keen precaution. It would never do for the authorities to have the faintest idea that truth lay in the story to which Brown would surely adhere. And Judson Parker was now firmly convinced that the conviction of Frank Brown would make Judson's own position secure.

"Poor devil!" he mused grimly as he walked homeward alone up silent Main Street. "But, then, he meant to steal, anyway."

IT WAS a sleepless night for the cashier of Helderberg's bank. What chance was there for discovery was the recurrent question that tortured him. With the canceled check in the bank's possession, no one would doubt the presence of the money in the bag when Brown snatched it up. The unconfirmed disclaimer of a man who had been cleverly led into confessing the theft of the bag itself would be unanimously ridiculed. Brown had admitted that there was no witness present when he cut open the bag. No; there was no witness—except the bag itself. It had already tattled on the man who had dared snatch it up. What else could it tell? The thought took a strange hold upon the real thief. The bag persisted in his thoughts, and when he dozed off, it was to awake again and again with a start at the delusion of that bag sitting on his dresser, the slit in its side for all the world like a tight-lipped grin.

He chided himself for loss of nerve and sought to divert his overwrought mind from the persistent nightmare by considering his next move. He had not been more than twenty miles away from Helderberg in his whole banking career. A sudden change in his habits would excite comment, possibly suspicion. He must wait until this affair blew over—two years, at least. In those two years he would prepare the minds of the community for his departure. In the mean time there was the necessity of changing that money in the vault into more portable form. Hundred-dollar bills, he decided upon. Anything smaller would be bulky; anything larger was foolhardy. The process must be slow. Even hundred-dollar bills did not circulate freely in Helderberg. The removal of any quantity of them from circulation at one time would court inquiry. The thing must be done right there in the bank's own vault. And, of course, there was always the danger of some reason for inspection by some one else of that locked box in the vault. Yet that was by far the safest place to conceal his money. No one hunting for it would look there.

For the acumen of detectives Judson had a wholesome respect, gathered principally from his favorite reading, but, to his mind, in spite of the clever deductions regarding the bag, Ben Cummings was no genuine sleuth. Suppose Bloodgood, Inc. should hire detectives from the big city? The idea chilled him. The bag might tell *them* what his friend Ben never suspected. He fell into an uneasy sleep, haunted by that impish bag, the slit now opened in a broad, mocking smile.

Morning found Judson Parker not repentant but subdued and regretful. What made him flinch from going ahead was fear of the unknown before him, the things he could not possibly foresee lurking along the path to confound him. Gladly would he have retraced his steps; but it was too late now. He must go on boldly with watchful eye for snares.

It was Jerome Molten, the district attorney, who crystallized this conclusion in the mind of the heavy-eyed cashier that morning. Coming into the bank, he waited until the others had left before broaching the subject of his call.

"You look a bit seedy this morning, Jud," he commented banteringly, little surmising the cause of the symptom which his shrewd eyes had observed. "I know how you feel. Don't lose your nerve now. Never been on the witness-stand before, hey?"

"No, I have not," admitted Judson hollowly. "Never was in a court-room before in my life."

"You'll be there with bells on, this time," said Molten cheerfully. "You are our star witness. There's the canceled check and your statement that the money went into the bag. Brown's lawyer—he's declined local counsel—sent to New York for his own—whoever he is, he'll train his guns on you in his cross-examination in an effort to discredit your statements. You've heard of such things. Don't let the prospect frighten you. He may shout and bully you, twist your answers and try to confuse you, wander away from the point he is after and suddenly interlard an innocent question on that very point, in the hope of making you contradict yourself; but all you've got to do is to get the truth clearly in your mind and stick to it. And don't worry, Jud; don't worry. Why, man, you've aged in one night! Remember how much depends upon you."

Jud remembered, through many harried hours. Here was something more reasonable to fear than an inanimate bag. One of the town's own counselors-at-law would have been preferable. He knew them all well, and believed, with reason, that not one of them could possibly forget, even in the heat of a trial, that the witness was Judson Parker, the long-faithful custodian of their own funds. Consequently their questions, though calculated to confuse, could not possibly be tinged with suspicion. But a lawyer from New York was an entirely different proposition. If Brown had sent that far, he had undoubtedly chosen a skilful attorney, mayhap as clever a strategist as ever went between book-covers, who, unhampered by preconceived ideas of the witness's probity, would skirmish along the whole line, seeking the least sign of weakness; and the slightest opening might mean a plunge through, and the end of everything. It behooved the cashier to take a grip on himself and look to his defenses, so he determined, for now was the issue clearly defined. The end could be only one of two things: Either the conviction of Frank Brown or the ignominious exposure of Judson Parker.

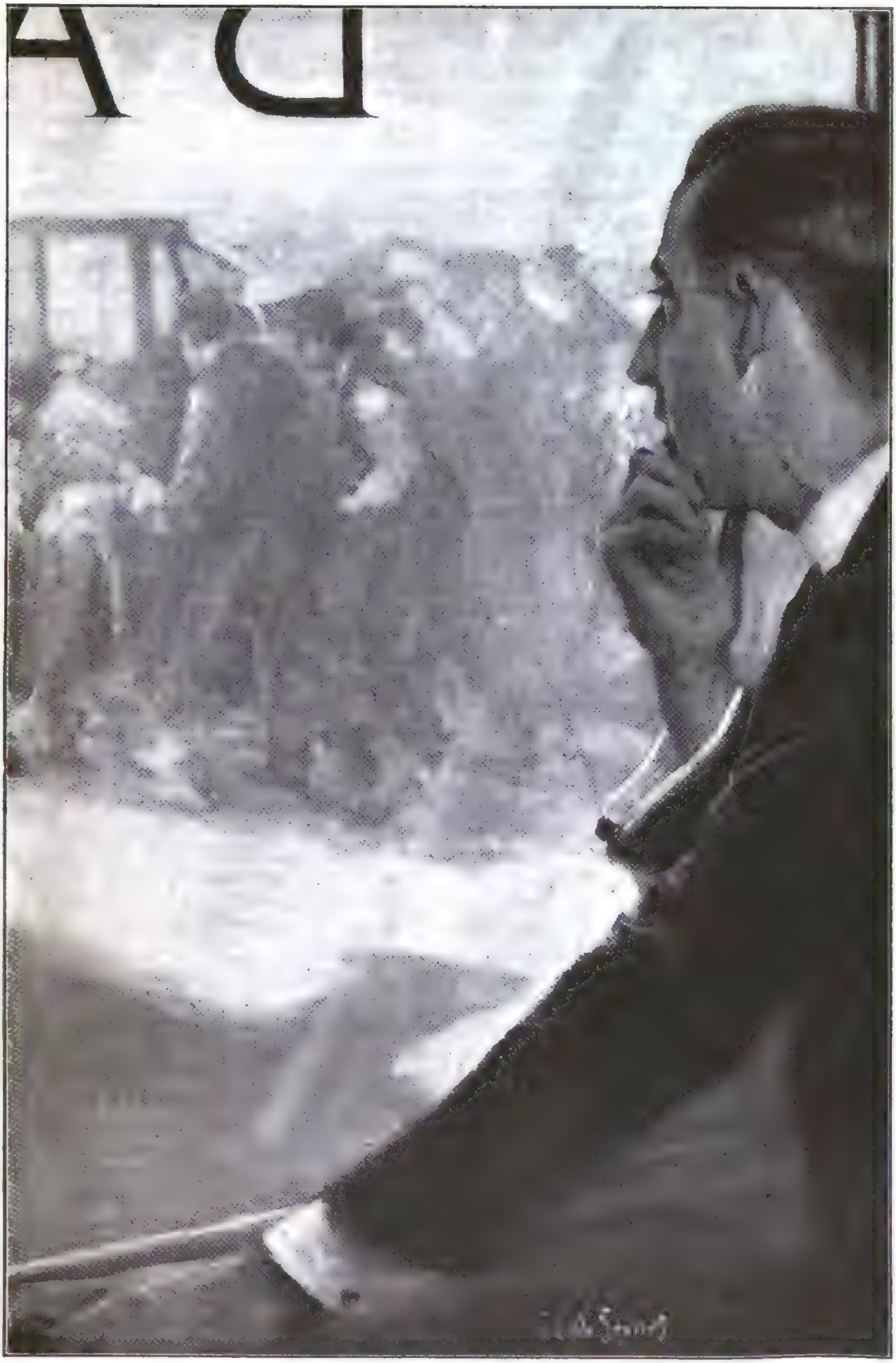
INTO the First National Bank of Helderberg two days later stepped a pretty woman stamped with the hall-mark of Manhattan Island. The legs of the cashier slid off his counter with such precipitance that they overturned the trash-basket, and "Great Cross-Examinations" was hastily dropped to join the litter. Judson Parker had been snatching a troubled nap between chapters and found himself in his shirt-sleeves, devoid of all dignity at a crucial moment. With profuse apologies he took his coat from its peg and put it on.

"Am I speaking to Judson Parker, the state's principal witness against Frank Brown for robbery?" asked the newcomer in a voice that was clear but soft.

"I am Judson Parker," admitted the flustered Judson.

"I am Frank Brown's attorney," said the lady.

"His attorney?" repeated the cashier incredulously and after a long moment of contemplation of the visitor. "Pardon me; but I didn't imagine—er—it's rather hard to swallow the idea of a woman lawyer."



It was while Parker was pondering over this queer behavior on the part of Dow Hagadorn that he saw Dow struck down by a big maroon limousine car.

"We have them in New York," said the visitor, smiling and presenting her card. "I have seen the district attorney and the chief of police, and have had an interview with my client. He tells a strange story."

"Miss Whittly," began the cashier, glancing again at the card to be sure of the name, "every bit of evidence points unmistakably to the guilt of your client. Would you like me to review for you the facts and evidence in the case?"

"I have heard them; but if it is not asking too much, I should like to hear the testimony you will give on the stand."

"With pleasure," he responded. Coming out of the cashier's cage, he offered her one of the two chairs that the depositors' room afforded and took the other one beside it. She sat back and listened attentively.

"WHERE was Dow Hagadorn taken to from the drug store?" the girl asked, when he had concluded.

"To Raines's, the undertaker's. Dow boarded with old Mrs. Simpson, but they didn't have the heart to carry him there."

"Who searched his clothes?"

"Raines and Ben Cummings, chief of police, I believe. You know, a list is made out of all he has on his person in such a case."

"If the money had been in his pockets, there were plenty of chances for it to disappear, were there not?" she suggested.

Jud hesitated for a moment to consider.

"I am sorry about this," he said deprecatingly, "but I must say I am sure I saw him put the money in the bag. Five hundred bills make a pile about three inches thick. There were two piles, each probably ten inches high, besides five hundred in silver, and silver weighs pretty heavy. He couldn't pack that amount around his person without its being conspicuous."

"The bag was locked?" the girl queried.

"Of course," answered Judson. "I told you how he took out his keys, opened the bag, put in the money and locked the bag again, testing it afterward to see if it was secure. He has gone through that same performance for years."

Mary Whittly, counselor-at-law, sat for some time looking about the bank. Judson watched her with keen pleasure. He was normal enough to enjoy the company of a pretty woman; but in this instance his elation was due largely to an entirely different cause. For days he had been harassed by the fear of facing the scathing fire of a master intellect on the witness stand; and here beside him sat Frank Brown's lawyer, a sweet-faced, frank-eyed slip of a girl, whose voice and bearing spoke of refinement and gentleness. Probably a deal of whatever success she had had in her profession was due to her personal attractions. He considered it her most valuable asset in the present instance. Certainly there was nothing about her to suggest more than ordinary brain-power. Mary Whittly would make considerable of an impression upon a country jury. He hoped she would. If the jury would surrender to her charms and free Frank Brown, the conscience of Judson Parker could withstand all else. But charm, he was positive, would not work to bring Judson Parker into the toils of the law. It would require a grueling, overpowering cross-examination to break down his testimony or trap him into a hint of the truth; and of this, Judson could not conceive the young woman capable.

"Was there any one else in the bank?" she asked at length.

"No one else. The president, even, was out."

"Hagadorn couldn't have hidden——"

"Not without my collusion," answered Judson, with a smile.

"I didn't mean to suggest that," she hastened to return. "I am merely trying to figure out what must have happened if Frank Brown is telling the truth."

Parker had a desire to slip off somewhere and have a good laugh. Here was confirmation of his estimate of his enemy. This unsuspicious woman, who would match wits with him in the court-room, was so considerate as not to wish to give him offense. He found himself contemplating her with condescension not unmixed with pity.

"I'm afraid your client is up against it," said he. "He admits that he made off with the bag. Leaving all question of the money aside, that was hardly the act of an honest man."

"Oh, I don't claim that my client is an honest man," the woman lawyer frankly conceded. "Unfortunately, he is the black sheep of a splendid family; but his sister is my dearest friend and I am determined to do all I can for him.

"His story is that when he saw Dow Hagadorn go into the bank and come out again that fatal morning, there came casually to his mind the thought of what a wad of money there must be in that bag," she continued. "Then the accident happened, and there was presented an opportunity that one of his weak moral fiber was unable to pass up. On the impulse of the moment, he quietly picked up the bag and unobtrusively walked off with it.

"He says he was so excited that he never thought of how light it was until he was some distance way. He went to a quiet place, ripped the thing open and found he had been stung. That's his story, and criminal though his intent undoubtedly was, if we can make the jury believe he is telling the truth, we can get him off at the worst with a sentence for petty larceny."

"I'm afraid you're up against it," Parker reiterated. "You'll never be able to make a jury believe that the money was not in the bag."

Miss Whittly shrugged.

"I shall do my best," she said simply.

"I wish I could help you!" the cashier exclaimed, with a degree of heartiness that was not wholly feigned. "I can't tell you how sorry I am, Miss Whittly, to have to testify against your client, but of course you understand that I must do my duty." He hesitated. "Why don't you advise the young man to plead guilty and throw himself on the mercy of the court? If it's his first offense, the judge might be inclined to deal leniently with him, provided he—er—shows a proper spirit."

The woman lawyer shook her head.

"Mr. Molten, your district attorney, suggested that, too," she said. "He even hinted at the possibility of a suspended sentence, provided my client would make restitution of the missing money. But, of course, that's out of the question. The only thing for us to do is to fight."

When presently she took her leave, she left Judson Parker a prey to conflicting emotions. Remorse, self-contempt, compassion for the unhappy young man whose story no jury could possibly believe, and even sympathy for the prepossessing woman lawyer were among them; but dominant over all was a feeling of relief. He was confident now that he had worried quite needlessly over the ordeal that was in store for him when he went on the witness-stand. Obviously he had nothing to fear from a counsel who so ingenuously laid all her cards on the table, face up.

WHEN Parker came out of the bank that evening, he found Helderberg agog with the news. A woman lawyer! Helderberg had heard of such an animal and had pictured an angular old maid with eye-glasses, hair brushed straight back or cut short, a sharp nose and a sharper tongue; but here was a bright-faced young lady dressed in modest, up-to-date city clothes, with a style to the way she fixed her hair, and hats that became her.

"They say that a man who's his own lawyer has a fool for a client," remarked District Attorney Molten to Parker. "But what about this poor crook who leaves his case in the hands of a woman?"

"She's a pretty woman," suggested the cashier, with a significant narrowing of the eyebrows. "That's her only hope."

"I'm reckoning on that," said Molten shrewdly. "I'm going to make it my business to queer that game. If the jury acquits him, it will be the greatest failure of justice that ever occurred in this county. But, of course, that's all nonsense. They can't acquit him."

Parker was relieved to find that the district attorney's estimate of Miss Mary Whittly's professional ability and mental attainments confirmed his own judgment. There wasn't anybody in Helderberg more adept at sizing up folks than Jerome Molten. Nevertheless, the bank cashier made it a point to watch Frank Brown's counsel closely from day to day, as opportunity offered. He realized that anything he had to fear must come at her hands, and he was alert for the first signs of suspicion on her part. That one so guileless as she could be capable of dissembling, if a hint of the truth should, perchance, come to her, he was unable to conceive.

The woman lawyer engaged a room at the Commercial Hotel. From that headquarters she set out each day to hold conferences with her client in his cell in the county jail, and to interview everybody she could find who had the slightest information regarding the case. After supper each evening she sat out on the veranda of the hotel. There she was visible to every passer-by, and passers-by became unusually numerous, particularly those of the male sex.

"THERE'S no denying that she's an attractive little thing," Jerome Molten conceded to the cashier of the First National Bank, a couple of weeks after Mary's arrival in town. "I'm beginning to think that it isn't going to be easy to pick a jury that won't be influenced to some extent by those eyes of hers. Such things oughtn't to be, of course, but human nature is human nature and the jury system is the one thing about the law that's human."

The district attorney paused for a moment. "I'm not worrying so much about the jury, though," he went on. "I'm fairly confident that I'll be able to counteract any influence she may be able to exert in that direction. What is causing me concern, Jud, is the possibility of—er—of the young woman employing the weapons with which nature has endowed her as a means of tampering with one of the state's witnesses."

"I— What do you mean by that?" Parker stammered, his color rising under the prosecutor's keen scrutiny.

"I've noticed that she drops into the bank here quite frequently to have a chat with you," said Molten significantly. "And it has been brought to my attention that, during the past week, you've got in the habit of hanging around the hotel evenings. I don't want to get personal, Jud, but, in my official capacity, I think I've got a right to warn you to be careful. As I've told you before, we're relying on you, more than anybody, to get a conviction against Brown, and it makes me sort of anxious to see the state's star witness getting chummy with the counsel for the defense."

Judson Parker grinned sheepishly.

"You've no need to worry about me, Jerry," he declared. "I guess I know how to take care of myself. She's a nice girl, and I don't mind admitting that she's got my sympathy. Seems a pity to see her becoming more and more discouraged each day. But, of course, I shall do my duty. Whatever—er—our relations, all cease when I take the witness-stand. I've made that clear to her."

It was a fact that the relations between Mary Whittly and himself were rapidly approaching the stage characterized by Molten as "chummy." The woman lawyer dropped frequently into the bank during business hours and made no effort to convey the impression that her visits were inspired by any other purpose than a desire to chat with him. It was a fact, too, that he had got into the habit of hanging around the Commercial Hotel evenings. Mary Whittly's frank smile and gracious attitude toward him were magnets which might have drawn him there, even if there had not been special reasons for his seeking every opportunity that presented itself for keeping track of her progress in the case of the state against Frank Brown.

If there had been anything about her manner to suggest that there was even an inkling of the truth in her mind so far as his status in the case was concerned, he would have been inclined to agree with Molten that there was cause for uneasiness in his growing intimacy with her—although not for the reasons that inspired the district attorney's apprehension. But the trend of her conversation when she visited him at the bank, or when they met on the street or at the hotel, made it quite clear to him that, whatever hopes she cherished of winning her case, they were not based on any doubts as to the credibility of the state's star witness. In fact, with her characteristic ingenuousness, she did not hesitate to confide to the cashier of the First National Bank that she was becoming more and more impressed with the futility of trying to make a jury believe that the money was not in Dow Hagadorn's bag when her unfortunate client had slashed it open.

As the days grew into weeks without any disturbing developments, and the day of the trial approached, Judson Parker's spirits rose. He cast aside "Great Cross-Examinations" and subscribed to a couple of copiously illustrated theatrical magazines and a gossipy daily of the great metropolis. His fingers even began to itch to open that strong box in the bank's vault and help himself to the $20,160.54 which still lay there in denominations precisely as called for by Dow Hagadorn's yellow slip. He resisted that impulse, however. Things were going too nicely, he told himself, for him to run any risks by a premature play.

He compensated himself for the forbearance by indulging in day-dreams in which the twenty thousand dollars and Miss Mary Whittly played prominent parts. He even rehearsed the speech he was going to make to the woman lawyer when he went to New York to look her up sometime after the trial.

"I hope there is no hard feeling, little girl. You can't imagine how miserable I have been over the thought that I was in a way responsible for your losing your case. Believe me, dear, I would have given worlds to be able to testify differently, but—I had to do my duty. I felt like a brute all the while I was on the witness-stand, but somehow I knew that you would be a good-enough sport to understand. It was largely that thought which sustained me in one of the most painful ordeals I have ever been through."

He derived a lot of satisfaction out of those dreams, but perhaps he was even more stimulated by an incident that occurred a day before the trial. He was seated in Jerome Molten's private office, chatting confidentially with the district attorney, and his gaze chanced to fall on an object on the lawyer's desk.

It was Dow Hagadorn's old black bag, tagged in anticipation of its presentation in court on the morrow. The gashed side was toward him, and as he gazed at the ugly leather thing, he was once more struck with the freakish effect produced by the juxtaposition of the stains in the leather and the slit made by the unhappy Frank Brown's vine-knife. The resemblance to a grinning human face was unmistakable, and the resemblance of that countenance to the face of poor old Dow Hagadorn was equally marked.

But what gave Judson Parker a thrill of joy was the mental reactions he now experienced. Whereas the first time he had seen this weird thing he had been chilled with a sense of foreboding, he now found himself strangely inclined toward mirth. Before, he had fancied that the bag's grin was sardonic to the point of malevolence; now he perceived that it was a friendly, jolly grin. He could almost imagine old Dow winking at him in sympathetic understanding.

He grinned back serenely at the grinning leather, and when presently he sauntered out of Molten's office, his step was buoyant.

RECALLING the earlier tremors and forebodings with which he had anticipated the event, the state's chief witness in the case of the People against Frank Brown was agreeably surprised at his own poise as he entered the crowded court-room on the day of the trial. Save for the slight twinge of conscience which came to him when his gaze first fell on the haggard, sullen young man seated at the counsel-table and the discouraged-looking young woman at his side, Parker actually enjoyed his march down the aisle to the front row of spectators' benches reserved for witnesses. He was not unmindful of the attention he was receiving from the audience; but, instead of being rendered uncomfortable by it, he was exhilarated. It was flattering to his sense of self-importance to know that he was regarded as one of the principal actors in the real life-drama that was about to be unfolded in that spacious, venerable chamber.

Almost as soon as he was seated, he twisted around to survey the gathering behind him, with the prideful interest of a stock-company actor "counting the house" through a peep-hole in the curtain. He observed with satisfaction the presence of the Hobsons and the Pinkhams, who had not been to town since Cleveland was elected, and who were now all dolled up for the show, with their luncheons bulging out of the women's knitting-bags. The whole of Helderberg appeared to be present—even old Mrs. Betty Simpson, the late Dow Hagadorn's landlady, who wore her best black that was reserved for funerals and other supreme social functions, and Stub Raines, Helderberg's undertaker, who for this occasion had donned a collar.

Judson Parker had sufficient sense of proportion to realize that it was not to hear him testify that all these folk were here. Not even the case of the People against Frank Brown had brought this large audience which jammed the big court-room to capacity. It was the unusual added attraction of a woman lawyer, the first who had ever pleaded at the bar of Helderberg, which was the real magnet. Nevertheless, the cashier of the First National Bank was well satisfied with his more humble share of the spotlight. He did not begrudge Mary Whittly her stellar rôle. On the contrary, it gave him a thrill of proprietary pride to observe the tribute that was being paid to the future Mrs. Judson Parker.

As he sat awaiting the arrival of the judge, he once more rehearsed the tender speech he was going to make, a few weeks hence, while seated opposite this charming young woman in a quiet, secluded corner of the most superlatively gilt of New York's gilded cafés, with the jazz band playing an appropriate accompaniment and the lights softly glowing.

He was aroused from this day-dream of twinkling lights, lilting music, delectable viands and soft-spoken words of love by the entrance of his Honor and the scraping of many pairs of feet as every one stood up at the court-clerk's perfunctory command. From that moment he dismissed from his mind all thoughts of the entrancing future and gave his attention to the present proceedings.

LITTLE time was lost in selecting a jury. Prosecutor Molten had all his own way, challenging for cause, or peremptorily, those of the talesmen who were young, unattached and obviously impressionable, and filling the jury-box with the most hard-headed, crabbed and misogynistical material available. Judson Parker noted with anxiety and disappointment that counsel for the defense acted as though she failed to grasp the significance of this development. Not once did she raise an objection or use any of the challenges to which she was entitled. She appeared discouraged to the point of apathy. Otherwise, surely she must realize that her only hope lay in obtaining the kind of jury which might reasonably be expected to respond to the charm and winsomeness of Frank Brown's attorney.

In his opening address, Jerome Molten took further steps to counteract the possible influence of Mary Whittly's captivating presence. With the "hard-boiled" jury he had succeeded in impaneling, such precautions appeared unnecessary; but the wary prosecutor was taking no chances.

"It is with considerable diffidence," he commenced, "that I face the task assigned to me to-day. I am compelled by natural instinct to defend myself for fulfilling the duties which the law calls upon me to perform. Dictates of chivalry"— he bowed gracefully toward the immobile figure of the defendant's attorney—"might make me hesitate, were I not sustained by a strong sense of moral obligation to this community.

"For the miserable young man who is to-day facing the just deserts of his reprehensible crime, I have no sympathy; but every drop of chivalry in my nature responds to the appeal of the magnetic personality of my learned opponent, who has come from New York to try to intervene between Frank Brown and the punishment he merits. She comes to plead a cause which, alas, she must realize is hopeless, and I pity her for its futility. So, too, I have no doubt, is there some measure of sympathy in your hearts, gentlemen of the jury, for this young man's attorney whom, did the circumstances permit, you and I would rejoice in being able to send back to New York flushed with victory. Unfortunately, however, the circumstances do not permit of any such happy development. We have sworn to uphold the law, and no wrenching of our heart-strings can excuse us from dealing out stern, uncompromising justice. He who lets any other consideration bias him here is a traitor to law and order and to the country of which he emptily bleats as the best on earth. In the proceedings that are to follow, not for one moment can any of us afford to lose sight of the fact that it is Frank Brown who is on trial here, and not the estimable woman at his side."

In clear, succinct phrases, Molten proceeded to outline his case. It was apparent that, if there had been any chance before of the personality of the counsel for the defense playing upon the sympathies of the twelve men in the jury-box, that chance had been destroyed by the prosecutor's opening words. Not once did they permit their eyes to wander to the attractive countenance of Mary Whittly, but sat listening with wrapt attention to Molten.

Such was not the case with Judson Parker, however. Throughout the prosecutor's speech and the examination of the first few witnesses, the cashier's gaze was riveted on the woman lawyer. Her costume was simple, almost severe, and her face practically colorless; but Parker was certain that she was the sweetest, prettiest picture that had ever graced the town.

His heart yearned for her, and he found himself regretting more than ever at that moment that he must give testimony which would go such a long way toward sealing the fate of Frank Brown. Not that he was stirred now by conscientious scruples, but he was suddenly seized with misgivings as regards Mary's future attitude toward him. Women were reputedly an illogical sex and inclined to be narrow-minded. Perhaps, after all, he would have difficulty in making her understand that in contributing toward her defeat he had been an unwilling martyr to the call of duty.

He was somewhat reassured presently, when her eyes chanced to meet his and her lips curved in a faint smile that certainly seemed to bear no trace of hostility or resentment. Evidently she was a good little sport, and willing to believe——

"Judson Parker to the stand!"

The state's principal witness arose promptly and went to face the long-awaited ordeal with a serenity that a few weeks ago he would have considered impossible.

IN UNFALTERING, high-pitched tones he told his story to the jury, drawing out the particulars with slow deliberation. He identified the check drawn by Spencer Bloodgood for twenty thousand, one hundred and sixty dollars and fifty-four cents and stamped "Paid;" and after the check had been put in evidence, he took the late Dow Hagadorn's ugly old black bag in his hands and identified that exhibit also. He swore that Hagadorn had cashed the check at the bank on that fatal morning, and that he, Parker, had seen the employee of Bloodgood, Inc. deposit the money in the bag only a minute before the unfortunate man was run down outside the First National building.

Moreover, he testified that he had been present later when the prisoner at the bar had made the damaging admission to Chief of Police Cummings that he had picked up the unfortunate Dow's bag and made off with it.

In short, Judson Parker made a perfect witness from the standpoint of the People. Prosecutor Molten rewarded him with a smile that conveyed both approval and encouragement as he turned him over to the counsel for the defense for cross-examination.

If there had been any doubts in the bank cashier's mind regarding Mary Whittly's sentiments toward him, they must have vanished within the next few minutes. For while members of the bar are not usually gracious to witnesses for the other side, sometimes feigning even a greater degree of hostility and scorn than they actually feel, Frank Brown's attorney's demeanor as she proceeded to cross-examine was gentle and conciliatory.

"You are quite sure that Dow Hagadorn placed the money in the bag after you had cashed the check, Mr. Parker?" she asked.

"Unfortunately, I am. There isn't the slightest room for doubt on that point. I saw him place the cash in the bag with my own eyes," the witness declared deprecatingly.

"And you are positive that he locked the bag after the money was in it?"

"Of course. He always locked it. Been doing it for fifteen years. You see, the bag has no spring-lock, and it was necessary for him to take out his keys and——"

"But are you quite sure that he locked it on this occasion?" the woman lawyer put in, the first trace of impatience in her tone. "Never mind what he was in the habit of doing, Mr. Parker. Are you willing to swear that you saw him lock the bag on this particular morning? Isn't there a chance that he stepped out of the bank with the satchel unlocked, and that the money could have dropped out of it, or been removed, before he was struck down by the car?"

Parker hesitated for the fraction of a second. He wished that Mary had suggested that theory to him earlier—before he had taken the stand. He perceived clearly now what she was driving at. If he testified that the bag was unlocked, or even evinced uncertainty on that point, it might provide a loophole which would establish a reasonable doubt in the minds of the jury as to the guilt of Frank Brown. For more reasons than one, he would dearly have liked to help her out by so testifying; but, unfortunately, he had already sworn, on direct examination, that he had seen Hagadorn take out his keys to lock and unlock the bag. Under Jerome Molten's genial questioning he had described that operation in detail. He could not change that testimony now. Moreover, had not

Ben Cummings and other witnesses testified that the bag had been locked when found?

"I am sorry to say there is no chance of that," he told Mary gently. "The bag was locked when Dow stepped out of the bank. I saw him lock it. Besides, Hagadorn wouldn't have neglected to lock it, with all that money in it, you know. He was the most careful and methodical of men. And the very fact that the thief had to slit the bag open in order to get at the cash would go to show that it couldn't have been unlocked, even if I hadn't seen Dow take out his keys and use them."

"That is all," said counsel for the defense, with a sigh. "I am through with the witness, your Honor."

SHE appeared thoroughly discouraged after that, and made no attempt to cross-examine subsequent witnesses, even when Molten put on the stand a man who swore that he had seen Frank Brown with the bag in his hand leave the vicinity of the accident while the crowd was around the stricken man. This witness was a hard-looking character, and there was reason for suspecting that he had seen nothing of the kind, but had come forward and volunteered his testimony for what he could get out of it. Even the prosecutor was astonished at his fair opponent's attitude in refusing to cross-examine in this instance.

"Your Honor," Molten said, in a tone of semiconfidence, and with a look of bewilderment, "I am embarrassed. This man should have some defense. The credibility of the witness——"

"Will the district attorney proceed with his case?" interrupted the woman lawyer, in a quiet but clear voice that fairly dripped with the honey of politeness.

"My dear Portia," said the elderly judge, with a kindly twinkle, "may you not have overestimated your powers of persuasion?"—indicating the jury-box with a rolling of the eyes.

The girl rose and faced the judge with a cool eye.

"May it please the court," said she, "I wish to take exception to your remarks, and to your characterization, and to your insinuations. This is not a court in Venice, where judge, litigants and spectators took all kinds of liberties. May I, with due respect, ask that this trial be conducted according to the rules as it would be if I were not a woman?"

"I stand corrected," said the judge courteously. "Proceed, Mr. District Attorney."

Molten was quick-witted enough not to let the lady carry off the honors too easily.

" 'A Daniel come to judgment,' " said he, with a gracious bow. " 'You know the law; your exposition hath been most sound.' The People rest."

There was a creaking of chairs, a rustle, a breath of whispers as Frank Brown's attorney stepped nearer the jury-box.

"Your Honor, and gentlemen of the jury," she began, "the defense intends to prove that Frank Brown did not take any money out of that bag you see before you—that it would have been a physical impossibility for him to have done so, because at the time he laid hands on it there was no money in it. I shall call but two witnesses. My first one, Mr. Stubbin Raines."

Stub Raines, proprietor of Raines' Funeral Parlor, uncomfortable in his funeral collar, took the witness-chair and was duly sworn.

"Who removed from the person of Dow Hagadorn all his personal effects on the day of his decease?" counsel inquired.

"I did."

"Who else was present at the time?"

"Mr. Cummings, chief of police, Doc Miller, as coroner, and Mr. Molten, the district attorney."

"State everything you found except his wearing-apparel."

"A handkerchief, a pocket manicure set, a few old letters, a pencil, a fountain pen, and sixty-five cents in change."

"Are you positive that was all—that you haven't forgotten anything?"

"I am quite positive."

Mary Whittly paused for a moment, and a faint smile curved her lips as she glanced at Judson Parker, who, although he was somewhat perplexed, smiled back at her encouragingly.

"One of the witnesses for the People has testified here that only a minute or so before he met with the fatal accident, Dow Hagadorn took a bunch of keys from his pocket and unlocked and locked the black bag he carried," she continued. "Did you find any keys on the body, Mr. Raines?"

"I did not," was the emphatic response.

"It's queer. I never gave it a thought until this instant. Most every man carries a bunch of keys. But there wasn't any on Dow when I removed his effects. I can swear to that—and Ben Cummings, Doc Miller and Mr. Molten will bear me out."

The woman lawyer glanced at the prosecutor, whose face bore the expression of a man who had just been kicked by a mule.

"That's all," said she sweetly. "Your witness, Mr. District Attorney."

"No cross-examination," Molten said gruffly. "It isn't necessary for the defense to go further in proving this point, your Honor. We concede it. It is a fact that I was present when the effects of the deceased were removed from his person, and —er—although the significance of the circumstance had escaped me before, I must admit that Hagadorn's bunch of keys was missing. Of course, they must have fallen from his pocket when he was struck down by the car. Evidently——"

"I object," his opponent interposed sharply. "If the learned district attorney is in a position to prove that the keys fell from Hagadorn's pocket, or were in his pocket at the time he stepped out of the bank, then let him produce his testimony."

"But we have already proved that the keys were in Hagadorn's pocket when he stepped out of the bank," Molten insisted. "One of our witnesses has testified that he saw——"

"Objection sustained," the court interrupted. "Save that argument for the summing-up, Mr. Molten. Call your next witness, Miss Whittly."

COUNSEL for the defense beckoned to Mrs. Betty Simpson, in whose house the late Dow Hagadorn had boarded for twenty years. As the old lady ascended the witness-stand, Mary Whittly caused something of a sensation by thrusting her hand into a brief-case and producing a bunch of keys to which was attached a gold-handled pocket-knife.

"Mrs. Simpson," the woman lawyer said gently, "can you identify these keys?"

"I am quite sure that I can," said the witness, with a sad smile. "I have seen them often enough. They were poor Dow's. There's the knife with his initials on it; so there can't be any question of that."

"When did you see them last?"

"A week after the poor fellow's death. You ought to know that, miss. You was there when I went to his room to look for them—and found them in the pocket of his other pair of pants."

"It was at my suggestion that you went to hunt for them?"

"It certainly was, my dear. You came to me and you said that you had a sort of feeling that poor Dow had forgotten his keys on that terrible morning when he left my house for the last time. I couldn't believe it at first, for he was always so regular in his habits, and in all the years he had been with me he had never forgotten his keys before. But you persuaded me to go up-stairs and look—and we found them in his trousers."

"And you handed the keys to me, Mrs. Simpson?"

"I did, dearie. You said that they would help in righting a great wrong, and I trusted you."

"I offer these keys in evidence." Miss Whittly picked up Dow Hagadorn's old black bag and offered it and the bunch of keys to the foreman of the jury.

"Satisfy yourselves, gentlemen," she said, "that on this ring is the key that opens the bag."

And when the last juror returned the articles, the girl smiled triumphantly.

"That is all," she announced. "The defense rests, your Honor."

"Have you anything in rebuttal, Mr. District Attorney?" asked the judge.

Jerome Molten rose slowly to his feet.

"I think not," he said gravely.

"It seems to me," said defendant's counsel, "that in the circumstances a motion for a direction of a verdict of acquittal is appropriate, as the evidence just disclosed proves beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant is not guilty of this crime, and, I might add, points unmistakably to the real criminal.

"It is self-evident," she continued, "that the cashier of the First National Bank of Helderberg lied when he testified under oath that he saw Hagadorn put the money in the bag and lock it. What actually happened, of course, was that Dow Hagadorn, after presenting the check, discovered that he had left the keys at home and rushed out with the intention of retrieving them, leaving the check in Judson Parker's hands until he returned.

"That might seem like an incredible piece of carelessness in a man as inherently cautious and methodical as the bookkeeper of Bloodgood, Inc. But, after all, wasn't it a perfectly natural act? All business in modern times is dependent more or less on faith in the other party.

"It must be borne in mind that large sums of other people's money were like so much merchandise to Dow Hagadorn. His boarding-house was located only a short distance from the bank, and it was necessary for him to have his keys in order to open the bag and lock it when he had put the cash in it. He figured on getting back within a few minutes, and in the mean time Parker could have the cash all counted out and ready for him. It never occurred to him that he was running any risk by leaving the check in the hands of the bank teller. But it was his tragic death and the coincidence that my unhappy client came along and appropriated the bag which tempted Judson Parker to become a thief. Your Honor, I move for a direction of a verdict of acquittal."

His Honor stroked his chin reflectively. "'A second Daniel!'" he quoted under his breath. "'O wise young judge, how do I honor thee!'" Then aloud, "What has the district attorney to say to that?"

"May it please your Honor," returned Molten, "it is as much the province of a prosecuting officer to protect the innocent as it is to convict the guilty. From the evidence it is quite apparent that this defendant is not guilty; therefore, I join in the motion."

He stepped to his opponent's side to hold out a congratulatory hand.

"How on earth did you do it?" he whispered.

"Logic," the young woman answered. "It was simply a matter of working backward. If my client was telling the truth about the money not being in the bag, and if the check was in the hands of the cashier of the First National, marked 'Paid,' it was an obvious conclusion that Hagadorn must have stepped out of the bank for some reason without receiving the cash.

"I set out to find that reason, and by a process of elimination it occurred to me that Bloodgood's unfortunate bookkeeper might have forgotten his keys. That looked like a plausible explanation, especially in view of the fact that Hagadorn's boarding-house was so near the bank. And when I had visited the undertaker and learned that no keys had been found on the body of the deceased, I knew I was on the right track."

"I must frankly confess," admitted Molten, "that it never occurred to me to doubt Parker. I've known him for years, and I'd have staked every dollar I have in the world on his integrity."

"Opportunity makes many criminals," said the young woman sadly, and she turned to glance pityingly at the cashier of the First National Bank of Helderberg.

He sat with his head pressed between his shoulder-blades, his body rigid as though he had been turned to stone, and a cold dampness on his brow. Not a muscle of his face moved; but his eyes were fixed in fascinated horror on the late Dow Hagadorn's battered bag, which rested on the clerk's table with the gashed side toward him.

To the rest of the court-room it was merely an old black bag with a knife-slash in it; but to Judson Parker it was a familiar face which bore a sardonic grin.

And he understood at last the meaning of that grin.

You often hear of the artistic temperament. Have you ever thought of its meaning? There will be a story,

"Shagan" By James Oppenheim

next month, which will set your mind at work on this interesting problem.

December EVERYBODY'S—*out November 15th*

Dead Elephants

When a Green Young Lady Ventures Where She Doesn't Belong—into Africa, for Instance—There's Sure to Be a Story with Thrills and Humor

By Edward M. Thierry

Illustrations by E. Fuhr

CAN you picture a girl taking dictation seated on a camp-stool in a tent and listening to the distant trumpeting of wild elephants?

And please remember there isn't anything in Africa so spine-chilling as the angry screams of a herd of elephants.

Yet Monica fearlessly came to the one spot in Africa where ready-made thrills were packed unexpectedly into a small space, armed with the extremely flimsy excuse that she wanted to be camp stenographer. And she didn't even bring a typewriter!

This circumstance was quite as ridiculous as her mission. Of course none of us in the elephant camp at Kafrabosch knew what her mission was when she arrived. We didn't dream that she had hatched a preposterous and fantastic plan, with the dreaded elephants as puppets on her romantic stage, to force the man she wanted into a position where he would do what she wanted him to do in the way she wanted him to do it.

Farmers and natives in that part of South Africa—a bit of the jungle curiously left remaining in an otherwise civilized section—were frightened stiff of the elephants in the Kafra Bush. But Monica thought of the fearsome beasts only in a strictly utilitarian sense—only so far as she could use them to help her tame the stubborn Frisbee Kettles. She tamed him, too! And she didn't hesitate to use me and the perfectly futile admiration I speedily acquired for her to help put the scheme across.

The thing turned out rather disastrously as far as I was concerned. I learned a lot at the Kafra Bush about elephants—and a lot about women, too. So that I am now in full agreement with my friend, Colonel Tottemley, the big-game hunter, that an elephant camp is no place for a woman. It annoys the animals—elephant and man.

The whole affair is a silly sort of story, especially my unflattering part in it—the way I was taken in. But I may as well make a full confession, nursing the vindictive hope that Mr. Kettles reads it and gets joy, or at least information, out of it.

Looking at Monica, you might have thought—as I did when I first saw her—that she never had been away from the atmosphere of drawing-rooms in her life. You would, if you only looked at her face. She had one of those baby faces, the kind that advertises innocence. She was small and fair. Two red cheeks made a charming contrast to the fringe of curls peeping from under the rim of her sun-helmet.

You wondered instinctively where a child like that learned to ride. For she sat her horse like a veteran as she came cantering along the open stretch of *veldt* to Colonel Tottemley's camp on the edge of the bush. The reddish African sun of late afternoon was at her back; it threw a soft light around her curls. And you noticed, as she pulled her horse up right outside the entrance to the camp *kraal*, dismounted nimbly and tossed the rein to a grinning chocolate native, that she had been riding astride; and that her khaki breeches, long khaki coat and leather puttees and mannish shoes fitted her slim young form irreproachably.

Her coming was so unexpected that the three of us, lolling back in the steamer-chairs drawn up to the fire—just lighted by Dick, the cook-boy, against the inevitable coolness of an African evening—sat up and stared. Then each struggled out of his chair.

We were all surprised. I also must have looked pleased; at least I felt so. Colonel Tottemley appeared indignant. And Kettles distinctly looked uncomfortable. I wondered.

Monica breezed up to the fire. "Breezed" alone described it.

"Hullo, Uncle Tot! Cheerio! And old Fris, too! Oh, doesn't he look funny, scowling that way? I'll bet he isn't one bit glad to see me! Are you, Mister Frisbee Kettles? I knew it! And after I came all this distance to see you pick ticks and things off elephants with tweezers—and to see old Uncle Tot march out like a mighty hunter and shoot the huge brutes! And—Well, I declare, I don't believe you're glad to see me either, old Uncle Crosspatch—now are you?"

THE girl, rattling away like a joyous piano jammed full of nickels, suddenly stopped, pouted at Kettles and jumped at Colonel Tottemley. She seized him by the flapping ends of the collar of his flannel shirt and pulled his head down and kissed him in the middle of the forehead.

"Here! Here! Stop this nonsense!" exploded the colonel, "And stop chattering so much and tell me what the devil you're doing here!" He looked fierce standing there by the fire.

The tempestuous newcomer hung her head. Her lower lip shot out just like a little girl about to cry. I felt uncomfortable, standing back out of the picture. I wanted to speak harshly to the colonel for talking so roughly, and I longed to administer a swift kick to the tall, awkward form of Kettles, standing behind him with that eternal scowl on his face. I should have liked to step forward and comfort the young lady, but I hadn't the pleasure of her acquaintance. I hadn't been introduced, you know; and I always tried to remember that the English were usually pretty stiff about those niceties. If this was a family quarrel—and apparently this delicious girl was the fierce old colonel's niece—who was I to interfere?

"I—I came to be your ty-typist!" Monica stammered, as if trying to keep back the sobs in the face of unjust abuse. "You wr-wrote mother you had so much b-business with museums about s-skulls and s-skins and s-skeletons you were going to h-hire a typist—and I know how—and I said I wanted to c-come—and she got m-mad and said I was g-going to the d-devil anyway as fast as I could—a-and I might as well come h-h-here!"

Sob!

It wasn't what she said, but the way she said it. That last was a facer! I almost burst into guffaws.

I stole a look at Colonel Tottemley. That last touch ousted him right out of his trench of anger. He made a funny noise in his throat and burst out laughing. Mr. Frisbee Kettles looked shocked.

Whereat Monica looked up with dancing eyes and laughed, too. The young rogue! I don't believe that sob was a real sob at all!

Then she hugged the colonel, who kept on laughing. And Monica laughed. And I chuckled audibly, which attracted their attention to me, and the colonel stopped laughing long enough to introduce me.

"Monica, I want to present Mr. Hocking—old chap, Miss Millet, my niece—as you have doubtless perceived. Monica beware, for he is an American journalist—or newspaper man, as he insists—over here in Africa to see how the other half of the world lives. But you've probably ruined yourself with him already. What a girl!"

Monica smiled beatifically at me and bobbed her curly head in small-girl fashion. I surrendered unconditionally.

And then I noticed that dolt Kettles was still looking glum. What an ass!

But that didn't seem to bother Monica. She slid into a steamer chair between Kettles and me and began to chatter at him.

"Now, isn't that lovely, Fris! Uncle says I'm to be his typist! Out here in a darling camp under the Southern Cross—nothing like that in England—right in the midst of the dreadful thorn bush, listening to the elephants scream! And typing letters about skulls and skeletons and things, and watching you chloroform worms and ticks and what-d'ye-call-'em! Isn't it just too jolly?"

Kettles smiled wanly and tried to look severe.

"But, my dear Monica, this is hardly the place for you—you know. Frightful place, this bush. Regular jungle, you know. Positively dangerous!"

"Dangerous—my hat!" she scoffed, laughing.

"Might as well leave off," put in Colonel Tottemley. "Braying at the moon is more useful than trying to make Monica change her mind once she's got an idea riveted in that pretty head of hers, Fris. She says she's come out here to go to the devil, so I imagine we'll have to stir up hell and make her comfortable. What, Mony!"

We all started laughing again—all except Kettles. He flushed a little and frowned in that well-bred, distant way of his. He sat back in his chair, staring moodily at Dick, the cook-boy—a squat native with a wide mouth full of teeth, in a ragged pair of trousers and an indescribably holey undershirt—pattering back and forth in his bare feet between the cooking-*kraal* and the packing-case table under the crudely built roof of twigs and boughs in a corner of the *kraal* behind our chairs. This was our "dining-room."

Darkness had sprung upon us. Almost instantly it had become so dark that only the fire at our feet made it possible to see each other.

I marveled that Monica showed not the slightest concern. Not even presently, when two of the colonel's dogs, lying beside her chair, suddenly woke up and began barking and scratching futilely at a scorpion that had tweaked one's tail. She leaned over, unmoved, and watched the pink-looking thing, seemingly all legs, scuttle away into the bush.

"How are your parasites?" she demanded of Kettles suddenly.

She seemed to know the young Englishman very well—too well, I thought darkly.

"All right—why?" answered the young veterinarian.

"Oh, nothing," Monica laughed. "I know you're interested in parasites—all kinds. Perhaps I may be able to help you."

"Thanks," said Kettles shortly.

He looked at her in a queer way—rather, I thought, appealingly and, what I was sure of, disapprovingly. For that I could have kicked him.

Colonel Tottemley interrupted my savage thoughts by echoing the announcement of Dick, the cook-boy: "Come on folks—scoff!"

"Yes, come on," exclaimed Monica. "I'm simply starving. What are we going to have for din—I mean scoff—Uncle Tot?"

"A guest should never ask that."

"I know. But I'm not a guest. I'm an employee—the camp typist! Tell me. I'm dying to know."

"Stewed elephant trunk—if you must know!"

"Oh! Splendid!" But Monica looked doubtful.

FRISBEE KETTLES was genuinely distressed over Miss Millet's invasion of the elephant camp. He told me so in our tent that night.

I've given you the impression that Kettles was a serious young man. He was more than that. He took himself, his work and all the world extremely seriously. He was very English, very correct and very stubborn—especially as to what he called man's "responsibilities" and woman's "sphere." With half an eye you could see that Monica's method of doing things jarred him.

Talking to me in the dim candle-light of our tent, he was rather incoherent, I thought. It amused me. For he seemed a most ungrateful ass, knowing the delightful young lady as well as he apparently did, and harping critically about her peculiar little ways—ways that I thought perfectly enchanting. I would have given a leg or two to have her call me by an intimate little nickname—like "Fris," confound him! I had already decided Kettles ought to have his head examined for not falling in love with her. For *my* part, I could do that without half trying; I wasn't sure that it had not happened already. I kept thinking of her as Monica; not so stiltedly as "Miss Millet."

As I have said, Kettles seemed to know Monica quite well. Just how well I didn't know—then. I had never met Kettles before—never laid eyes on him until my arrival at the elephant camp. I had never heard Monica Millet's name mentioned. I didn't even know Colonel Tottemley had a niece. And Kettles wasn't taking me into his confidence now—not a word about his past relations with Monica.

"Please don't mistake my meaning," Kettles said anxiously.

He had been rambling on about women in general, and apparently meaning Monica in particular. But he talked so vaguely of "tomboys" and "doll girls" and the "clinging-vine type of women." I pieced together his remarks as best I could, and I gathered that he had known Monica before and admired her—yet he disapproved of certain traits in her.

The best I could make of it was that Kettles was head over heels in love with Monica—in a paradoxical sort of way. He seemed very sensitive about her bantering attitude toward his own work. I think he had a vague idea that he ought to be a tremendous hero in her eyes—yet he thought she, as the leading representative of her sex, ought to fill a very definite dignified niche and, though perhaps looking up to him, ought not lean on him.

Poor old Kettles! I didn't know then—as I do now—what a complete transformation of ideas about women was in store for him!

"As I see it," Kettles went on sermonizing, "a woman should be useful in her own sphere. She should have poise, dignity, helpfulness. The clinging-vine sort of woman is a mere child, who leans on you, does nothing for herself, for anybody. She sets up a wail—and man must run to her assistance. The tomboy merely makes herself conspicuous and ridiculous. Usually she is vulgar. And, what is worse, she is merely masquerading in a part. She hasn't the self-reliance she pretends to have. It's all such silly rot! Women are primarily actors. They play a game anybody with intelligence can see through—and a man is expected to be both audience and scene-shifter."

I hadn't expected such entertainment out in the jungle. Kettles sat there on the edge of his cot with a face like a philosophic old owl.

"But where does the doll come in?" I prompted.

"Well, a doll woman might be neither a clinging vine nor a tomboy. She just exists to be pretty—never any usefulness whatever. But she's like the clinging-vine woman because she's a parasite."

"Parasite?"

"Yes, parasite!"

"Oh, come," I laughed; "you've got parasites on the brain."

"Perhaps. I happen to know their habits!" he said savagely.

Of course I have told you Frisbee Kettles was one of those scientific "'ologists," a university man recently out from England. He had been sent to Colonel Tottemley's elephant camp at Kafrabosch by the Veterinary Laboratory of the Ministry of Agriculture to study parasites on elephants and other forms of wild-animal life. It was part of the campaign to stop destructive epidemics—like the dread rinderpest—among cattle. Parasites, like ticks, for instance, were carried with immunity by wild beasts spreading disease among domesticated animals.

MONICA earlier in the evening had spoken jestingly about Kettles' parasitic experiments. I noticed then that he didn't like it. His work was genuinely serious, and none took it more seriously than himself. So I thought it best not to twit him.

But I did think it was delightfully incongruous for Kettles to drag his scientific "'ology" into a discussion of women. I wondered what Monica would say if she knew Kettles had called her a parasite—compared her to a tick!

A tick, to my unscientific eye, is a nasty black little round ball of a bug that sets up housekeeping in a quiet, out-of-scratching-distance place and sucks out blood and raises a large family—and gives absolutely nothing to its involuntary landlord in return for board and lodging except an itching sensation and eight or nine different varieties of death-dealing diseases.

As I crawled under the mosquito-net into my cot-bed, I decided that Kettles, like myself, thought a great deal of Monica. I would have him for a competitor then!

What cheek, though! I felt like getting up and going over to his cot and pounding on his silly head till he realized that I didn't think she was a tick—I mean a parasite!

I decided that Kettles in his ridiculous sermon classified Monica as a tomboy *and* a doll. Well, she was full of pep, all right—if that's what a tomboy is. And I certainly liked to look at a pretty little doll. It rested my eyes. Monica would rest anybody's eyes. She wasn't a bit hard to look at, if you know what I mean.

That reminded me that I had forgotten to shoot at Kettles, when he was chattering away about women parasites, that Monica *was* doing something useful. She was here in camp as Colonel Tottemley's typist! But he probably would have replied in that irritating, well-bred way of his that I was probably forgetting that he was talking impersonally—oh, yes, strictly impersonally for one must not be rude—and besides didn't I realize that that was all bally rot, and that Miss Millet probably couldn't operate a typewriter and no doubt knew as little about the mysteries of shorthand as she did about elephants?

Dreamily I agreed with myself that such a reply probably would have been quite accurate. But it didn't cut any ice with me whether she knew anything about typewriters, shorthand or elephants——

Elephants! Sleep drifting upon me was interrupted—as almost inevitably at night in this African thorn jungle—by the far-away hideous sound of trumpeting elephants. The queer noise that was a rumble yet had its shrill punctuations of screams came through the flimsy windbreak of piled-up branches around our camp. I knew by the sound that the huge beasts—more dreadful as man's enemies than lions—were far away in the almost impenetrable bush. But the sound was terrifying. It always is—even though I knew there was scarcely any danger of an unprovoked attack at night. Elephants can scent a man at a greater distance than any other animal, often when they're nearly a third of a mile away; but, though they are night prowlers, they rarely charge unless they are shot at.

I had quaked before under that far-away noisy frightfulness. Especially the first night I was in camp. I wondered if little Monica were asleep—if she were listening to the trumpeting and screaming, and shivering with fear. I hoped not.

Frisbee Kettles' snores reminded me, dreamily, that he was behaving in a beastly way—the fool!—about that poor little girl——

I had a vague impression that I saw Kettles standing petrified with fright, caught and held by "wait-a-bit" thorns—a giant elephant was charging at him, crashing through the jungle, his huge bulk leveling bush and *speckboom* tree—trunk curled up over his head, his small mouth open—emitting horrible shrieks and screams of hate—and the wicked trunk was just about to curl around Kettles' quivering body when Monica came dashing up with Colonel Tottemley's .550 elephant-gun and shot him—the elephant, not the other brute—right under the eye—and the frightful mammoth doubled up like a jack-knife, falling dead with a bullet in his brain, a shrill, ear-splitting scream as a death-cry—and Kettles collapsed, fainting, on top of him—and Monica dropped her gun and knelt by him and began pouring baby talk into his confounded ear——

Whereat I woke up, overheated, and glad—not so much that the first part of the tragedy wasn't true, but inexpressibly thankful that the last part was only a dream.

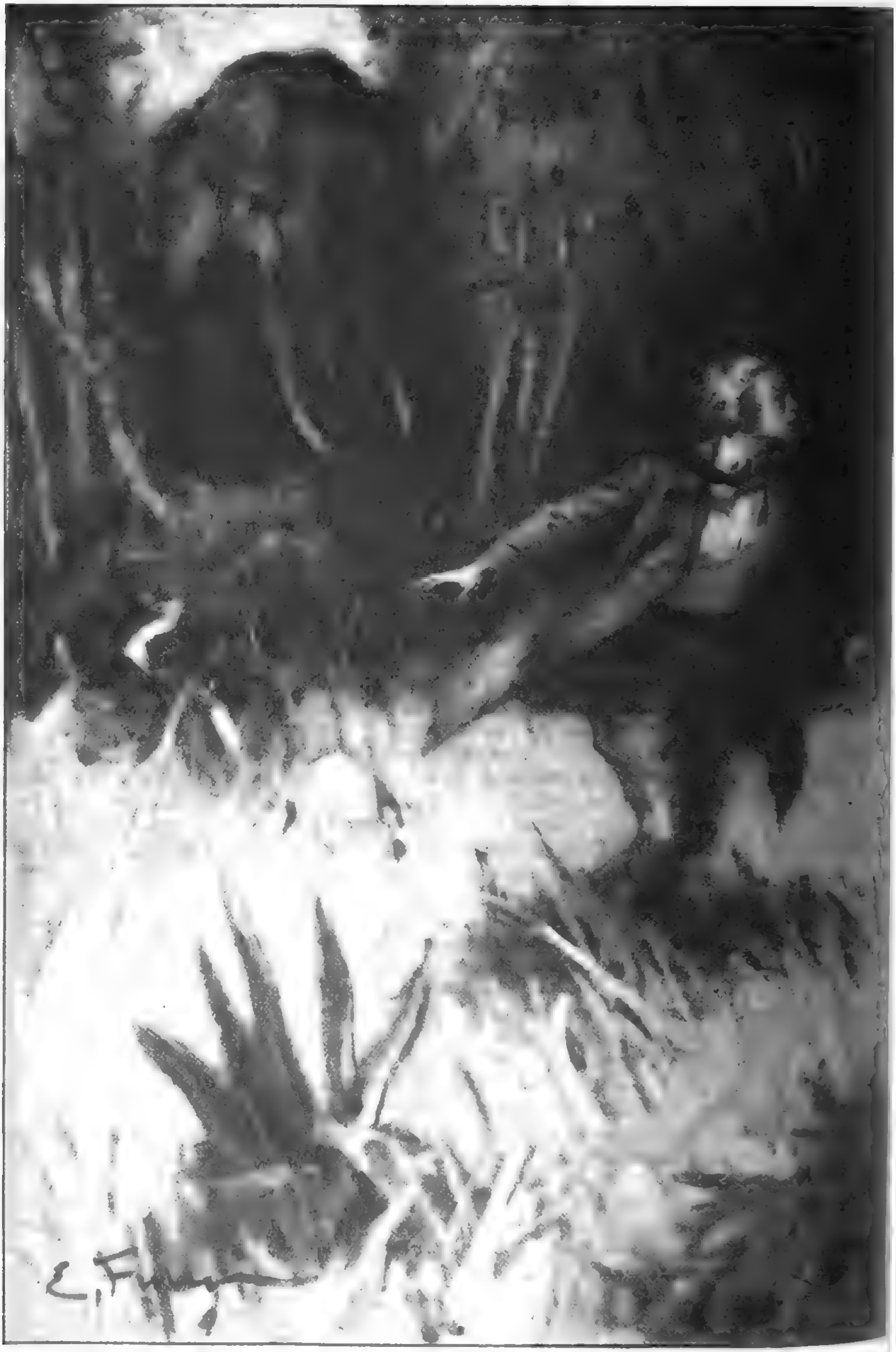
"Parasite—my hat!" I muttered, borrowing Monica's expression. I wondered dimly if the child by any chance heard that ass Kettles yapping about parasites— Such a pity— And she was such a good sport—ate that stewed elephant trunk, in spite of her first qualm, just as if it were beefsteak—Not many doll girls like that——

A COUPLE of days later, Colonel Tottemley went out into the bush to shoot elephants. And there was excitement in the camp *kraal* late in the afternoon when he returned with news that he had shot two—and had captured a baby elephant!

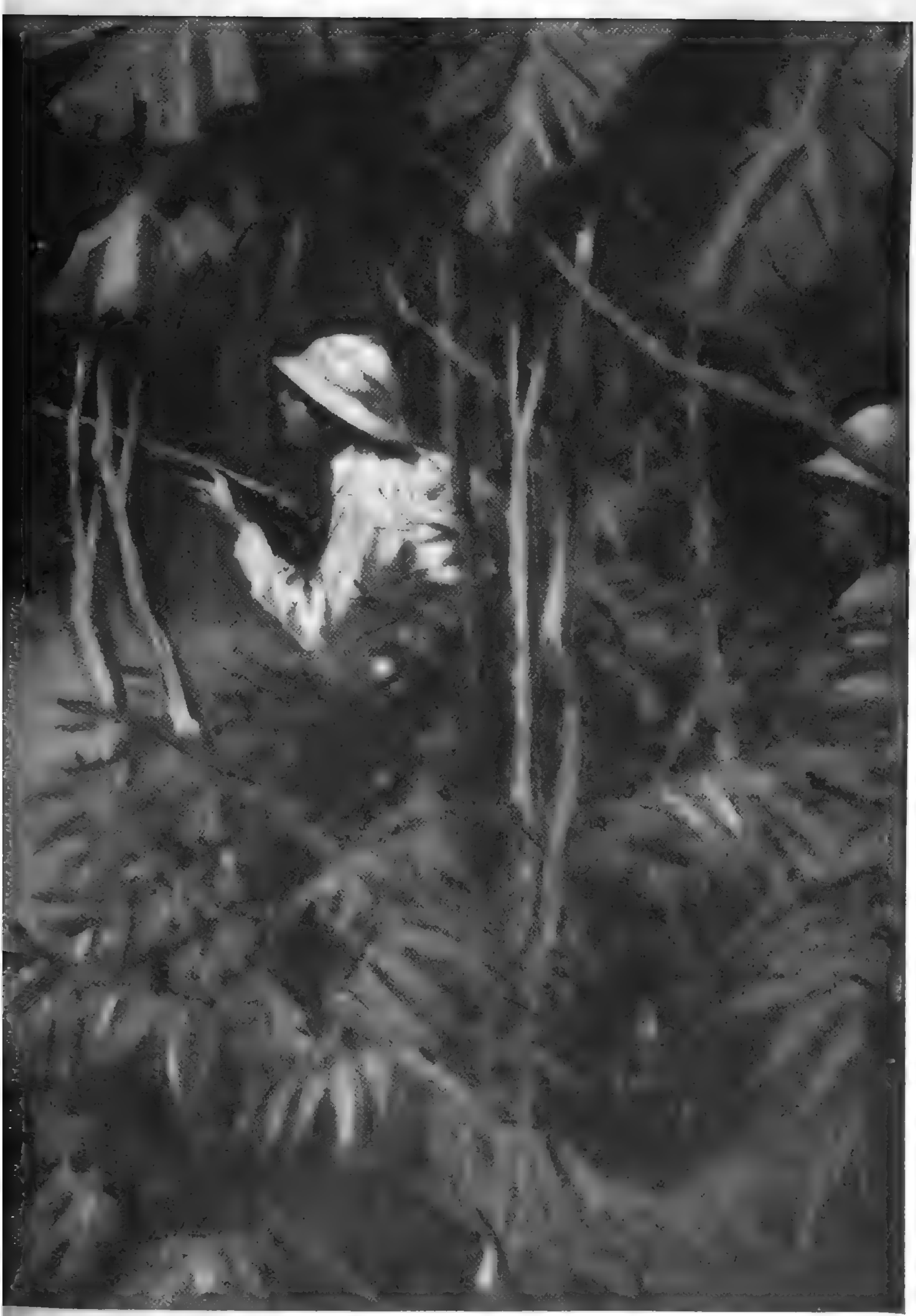
Monica shrieked with delight. Where was the baby—Jumbo, Junior, she named it right there? The native boys were bringing it in, the colonel said; it had been wounded accidentally in the leg.

"What a shame! I shall have to nurse it," Monica exclaimed. I watched her smilingly as she ran off to instruct Naba—dusky wife of Dick the cook-boy, just imported from the neighboring native *kraal* to act as maid to Monica—to have boiling water ready.

Naba, woolly-headed, barefooted and clothed in a discarded and discolored wrapper, flew around obediently as the Little Missus—the name the natives respectfully endowed Monica with—fired orders at her. Naba was proud of her job. She, for once, was on a footing with the men of her tribe. Every white man out on the



I heard a great crackling of underbrush behind her. "Oh, Fris! Fris!



risie!" It was a shriek of agony. "Save me! Look! He's charging!"

African *veldt* or in the bush has a native boy—"boy" often being a misnomer, considering age—to wait on him; to clean his boots and bring him morning coffee, in bed, and coffee eternally during the day—coffee, the great African thirst-quencher; for water usually is scarce, and one must drink. So, under the unusual circumstances of having a white woman in a camp, Naba was obtained as Monica's personal servant.

"Both bulls," Colonel Tottemley was saying to Kettles, as I reluctantly dragged my gaze and my attention from the busy Monica and her preparations for the reception of the wounded baby elephant, "Neither one of them standing under ten feet! Only one, though, is tusked. But they're beauties—weigh one hundred and fifty pounds each, those tusks, if they weigh an ounce!"

"Parasites on them, I suppose," said Kettles.

The man was dippy about parasites! I made a mind-bet that if the colonel suddenly fell dead Kettles would kneel down in that cold-blooded way of his and begin pawing him to find out if he had picked up any interesting specimens in the thorn bush!

"Oh, I didn't look," replied the colonel, carelessly. Kettles looked grieved.

"We'll go out first thing in the morning and see them," the colonel went on. "You can have a look then, and I can set the boys to work skinning them. I came on a herd of twenty or so about nine or ten miles from here. One charged, and I dropped him with a bullet in the heart. The others stampeded away. Just about gave 'em up when I came on one sound asleep. I was within six feet of him—as usual you just can't see those huge gray shapes through the tangle of bushes. The old fellow woke up when the dogs barked, but I got him in the brain just as he got up and started to charge. His carcass is about half a mile away from the other one."

"But the baby elephant?" demanded Monica, joining us.

"Oh, that was an accident—the calf," explained the colonel. "I was just starting back when the dogs started yelping over in the bush. I thought it was another bull. So did the boys—the blighters let go with their pop-guns. They always do when they get frightened, in spite of my orders. I wouldn't let them carry the rifles at all—no good, anyway, shooting one of those things at an elephant—but the beggars won't work for me if I refuse to allow them to carry some kind of arms. Well, one of their bullets hit the little fellow in the right fore leg. Just a flesh-wound, I think. I found him hobbling around, with the dogs worrying him. The boys wanted to chain him up, but I said no. I knew he would follow us. He did, just as contentedly as if he was with the herd. But he had to go slow; the boys are walking in. I got my horse where I left him at the end of the new road and hurried in."

The colonel explained the mystery of the calf. It appears a herd of elephants browsing in the bush travels in close formation, and sometimes pretty fast. From the top of a hill you can see them in a valley—*kloof*, they call it in Africa—going along, the whole herd pushing the calves along in front. When they charge, the poor young ones are right in the front line, unless they get separated in the scramble. I suppose Jumbo, Junior got separated when Colonel Tottemley started to shoot, and was rambling around looking for his mother when the dogs discovered him in the bush.

THIS was all extremely interesting to me. For, touring Africa, I had found nothing quite so novel as this spectacle of a government trying to exterminate a herd of wild elephants. You may have thought it fictional when I spoke of Monica Millet unexpectedly riding into Colonel Tottemley's camp at Kafrabosch—just as if she had ridden a short distance out of town to the home of a gentleman farmer.

Curious as it may seem, it was just like that. At first I wouldn't believe it, either. Here was the Kafra Bush—with the cluster of houses on its edge called Kafrabosch, in the old Dutch way—a dense jungle of thorn bush forming a rectangle, about sixteen miles long and eight miles wide. It is a great area of mimosa and prickly-pear, with strong creepers binding it in a most inextricable fashion. Thorny branches of the bush and undergrowth are tightly interlaced and the thorns—everything that grows in Africa seems to have thorns—range all the way from the invisible ones, the "*wait-a-bit*," to the huge barbs five and six inches long and sharp as a needle.

You imagine a jungle as a place of big trees and undergrowth. Well, Kafra Bush is a jungle, though neither bushes nor trees are usually more than eight feet—sometimes twelve feet—high. There are trees. But they are squatty and low. They look substantial, but if you climb one you will find it bending like a rubber ladder. This is *speckboom*, the elephant tree, the soft rubbery branches and leaves of which are delicacies in an elephant's diet.

It takes you hours to force your tedious way through this thicket, at the cost of torn clothing and scratched hands and face. Whereas the giant elephant just crashes right through. And he can look over it and see you coming; but you cannot see him.

On all sides of Kafra Bush were villages. And less than forty miles away was a city—a real city. Innumerable herds of elephants that had roamed Africa in ancient days had been driven into the central tropics before the march of civilization, save this one surviving herd. For years now it had been cut off from its fellows; not another elephant within a thousand miles. This was an elephant jungle. But cold-blooded ambitious farmers kept encroaching on the elephants' domain. In their greed for land they tried to oust the great beasts. And they, driven toward the river in the *veldt* lowlands when drought came and dried up the water-holes in the bush, ripped up miles of fences, destroyed dams and occasionally killed a few people. Farmers demanded the elephants' extermination. Scientists and other thinking people protested; they argued against the wilful destruction of wild animals already too near extinction. But the elephants had to go or the farmers had to go. A narrow-minded government decreed the former. And thus Colonel Tottemley was hired to be the executioner. Even he, never more than a big-game hunter and soldier, revolted a little at the crime of it. But he took the job, excusing himself on the ground that he was a hired servant of the government and that he was doing everything possible for science by preserving skins and skulls and skeletons of the beasts he slew—which, incidentally, were sold to museums at top prices. And the meat of the slain was made into *biltong*, dried strips of flesh, which was sold at higher prices than beefsteak! The meat—quite good meat, as I had found and Monica was beginning to admit—came from the trunk, the legs, the feet and from either side of the back-bone.

So you see this elephant jungle was right at a city's back door. Monica, living there, had only to take a train to the village of Kafrabosch, her obviously new khaki outfit including breeches not even a matter of comment in a country where civilization and the wilds rubbed elbows so strangely; and in the village take a horse for the ride of a few miles to Colonel Tottemley's newly built *kraal*.

Monica had gone into raptures over the baby elephant when the native boys led Jumbo, Junior into camp just before nightfall. She had bathed its wound and Frisbee Kettles had helped to dress it with a huge bandage. I envied him; but he was supposed to know about animals and diseases and things of that sort, and I was utterly ignorant.

BUT what a row there was at the end! Kettles turned from his bandaging and calmly pulled a long shining pair of tweezers out of his pocket and began probing back of the baby elephant's huge ear. Jumbo, Junior squealed and squirmed.

"Oh, I say, Fris! What are you doing?" Monica asked, looking up from where she knelt beside the diminutive, three-foot-high beast.

"Looking for parasites," he replied casually.

"What!" Monica, flushed with anger, jumped to her feet.

She reached over and grabbed the tweezers out of Kettles' hand. He looked shocked. He couldn't believe the thing had happened.

"Parasites!" she cried scornfully. "Is there ice in your veins? Haven't you any pity for a poor, wounded, motherless animal?"

Her eyes flashed. She held the tweezers in a clenched fist against her heaving bosom. I thought she was going to stab him with them. I hoped she would.

"Monica!"

That's all Kettles said. But his tone was like a cold shower. It's putting it mildly to say he was horrified, scandalized, shocked beyond words. He looked as if she had just committed an atrocious sacrilege.

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I've no doubt he did consider it a sacrilege.

Then he began to get angry as it sunk into his scientifically hardened brain that Monica was forbidding him to carry on his work.

"Parasites seem to be your gods!" she said in a shrill, angry little voice. "I think its perfectly beastly!"

"Parasites *are* beastly—all kinds," he said rudely. I wasn't sure whether Monica caught his discourteous meaning. But I did.

"Say—" I started to interfere.

But Monica, looking at me in a silencing way—with eyes that showed she wasn't as obtuse as might be imagined—cut in.

"Indeed! I suppose you can't understand anything but parasites. You'll marry one, I imagine—just to experiment!"

"Many chaps have." Kettles laughed mirthlessly.

Monica passed quickly from the red-anger stage to sarcasm. She pointed at the Englishman and said scornfully:

"Fearless man! Parasites everywhere—menaced by parsites! See him to-morrow in his war-paint, all knives and tweezers and specimen-bottles and wicked weapons—in his stock-yard apron, prancing around the poor dead bodies of once ferocious elephants!

"Huh! Anybody could perform an autopsy on a *dead* elephant! You don't need courage for that. Why, if you'd been me you wouldn't have had the courage to come out to this camp of men and guns and jungle and trumpeting elephants—and a bloodthirsty parasite-hunter!"

Lord, how she gave it to him! Her tone had a knife-edge. I stood back and watched gleefully. Kettles' face was flaming crimson. He started to say something, but the masterful Monica cut him short.

"I thought men had nerve! I'd like to see *you*, Mister Frisbee Kettles, go into the bush and kill a *live* elephant! Then you could get your disgusting parasites first-handed!"

Kettles stood looking at her angrily. Then without a word he turned and stalked away to our tent. When I went in later he was still in a towering rage.

They've got scandalous customs in Africa. Chief of them is getting up in the middle of the night.

To me it seemed the middle of the night when my native boy tugged at my blankets. It was still dark. I cursed him for waking me from a beautiful dream. Monica and I, just married, had our heads together over the family dictionary, methodically deleting from it all reference to parasites!

The boy was hissing his old morning call, "*Ska-a-aze, Baas!*" Which meant "Drink, Boss!" He handed me my morning coffee and shuffled away.

EVERYBODY that morning was up before dawn. We were starting for the scene of yesterday's killing. Colonel Tottemley was in good humor because he had bagged a couple more elephants. Monica bubbled over with youth and jollity and pep; she was happy and eager for the trip into the thorn jungle to see her uncle's conquests. I felt tip-top because—well, because she was effervescing; and because I anticipated the welcome opportunity to monopolize her society.

It looked as if I wasn't going to have any competition this morning. For Monica was absolutely ignoring Frisbee Kettles. And he was walking around scowling, looking like an icicle and fairly dripping with well-bred hauteur. He was in a nasty humor after the previous evening's unpleasantness, and he ragged his native boy unmercifully as he dug out the implements of his trade—the knives and things Monica had scoffed at—preparatory to making up a pack for the boy to carry.

I had rather a shock just before we started. A boy came running to say the horse Monica had ridden into camp had stepped into an *aardvark* hole during the night and was too lame to travel. Instantly I offered Monica my horse. The shock came when I stopped to realize that I would have to walk, for I suddenly remembered there were no other horses except the colonel's, Kettles' and my own.

The colonel and Kettles had already ridden out of the *kraal*. I was happy, anyway, because I'd got ahead of the sulking Englishman. He probably would have offered Monica his horse, but I beat him to it. And though I flinched at a nine-mile walk—twice that distance, counting the return trip—I wouldn't have missed my opportunity with Monica if I had had to go on hands and knees.

Besides, my self-sacrifice made a strong impression. She thanked me prettily and, I thought, with rather a disdainful look toward the disappearing Kettles for not waiting to see her safely mounted.

She rewarded me by curtly announcing to Colonel Tottemley and Kettles—when they stopped to wait for us and learned my predicament—that everything was quite all right, and they needn't mind offering to take turns walking at this late date, for the gentleman—meaning me—had been unselfish about it, and was perfectly well able, in fact eager, to walk beside her! But would they please go slowly and give us a chance?

Awfully nice of her, I thought, haughtily refusing a lift—for me! It seemed I didn't have any say in the matter. Sort of an air of proprietorship she had assumed over me. The colonel grinned. Kettles looked crestfallen. And I laughed inanely, quite willing that she should boss me like that. I felt I had scored again over Kettles, even if it was at the expense of aching feet.

MONICA kept up a jolly chatter all the way. She kept calling to the colonel and Kettles to slow down, in tender solicitation for me. She jogged along just ahead of the "*safari*" of native boys trotting along in characteristic single file carrying Kettles' scientific hardware, cameras for Monica and me, our lunch, water-bags and paraphernalia for their forthcoming work of skinning the elephants, preparing the skeletons, turning the flesh into *biltong*, and preserving the tusks for ivory.

It wasn't an easy hike for me. The first few miles it was fairly decent, along a narrow road of the cow-path type. Part of the time I hung on to Monica's stirrup, which didn't help me along so much as it developed a silly satisfaction at having my hand right against her trim little foot. That pretty shoe of her's was so close that I spent a lot of time admiring it.

Then the road stopped, and instead of having the thick bush on either side of us, we found ourselves in the midst of it. Presently it became so thick that the others had to dismount. Then we came to a steep cliff. I helped Monica down gingerly and led her horse. From the top of the hill we could see for miles the deep *kloof*. It looked like a forest of trees. A fine-spun moss of a light-green color hung over it everywhere, and the whole thing looked like a great, flat elderberry bush in blossom.

The shallow bush in this valley might be screening scores of demon elephants. Down at the bottom, where lie the water-holes, we knew we were in danger. Colonel Tottemley, in the lead, had unslung his elephant-gun ready for action.

"Shouldn't have let that girl come here," he growled.

Monica overheard. "Never mind, old thing!" she called cheerfully. "I'm having a ripping time—and my friend, Mr. American, is defending me!" She giggled at me and I smiled foolishly.

"Oh, is he?" snapped the colonel.

Kettles scowled jealously. And I forgot to be peevish over what the colonel had said. Anyway, I was thankful to the colonel for having his gun ready, for having such a splendid reputation as a crack shot, and for being able in some uncanny fashion to find his way in the abominable bush. We kept close to him. I was utterly lost, while he, marvelous chap, twisted and turned and circled around and dived straight ahead—never at a loss for the proper direction. The man must be a reincarnated homing pigeon, I thought.

Down through the valley we went, and up the cliff on the other side. For short spaces it was possible to go on horseback. Especially when the colonel sent several native boys on ahead with axes and bush-knives to hack a path.

At last we reached the scene of the first killing. The great beast lay on his side, a bullet-hole under his right eye. The bullet had penetrated the brain, the colonel said, pointing out the angle of its course. That's the trick of it, shooting just right to get that proper angle for the brain, if you're firing directly at the charging elephant, or for the heart, if you're firing from the side.

Six paces away the colonel pointed out the spot where he had fired the fatal shot. In his death-agony the giant had thrashed down the bush. Away in the thickets near by we had followed the *spoor*—the trail—of other elephants. If you had doubted before that wild mammoths could really exist in the very heart of African civilization a few hours' railroad ride from a city, you had only to look at the bulky carcass and follow the near-by *spoor*. The colonel said it looked fresh and that the herd had probably passed near the scene since the killing. Bush had been crushed and leveled. You could see *speckboom* trees uprooted, and great freshly dug holes, where powerful feet and tusks had ripped up the earth as the elephants searched for *barroe*, a large turnip-like bulb that had a long, thin vine above ground, a bulb that elephants relished, and which often had served man in the jungle as food and water; for the white pulpy meat produces a cool, watery juice when sucked.

We had cause to learn that presently. For when the boys built a fire and served a lunch of elephant meat and bread, we found the blighters had drained the two water-bags of every drop of water we had brought from camp! We were horribly thirsty. So we made the boys dig up a few *barroe* bulbs. We pared off the earth-clotted skins and cut big white slices, which we chewed for the thirst-quenching juice.

Kettles had already begun messing around the slain elephant looking for parasites. Every now and then he gave a gurgle of glee. Apparently he was having great luck, scientifically.

Monica made a grimace of repugnance and turned her back. She found a seat against a tree—to leeward—and I joined her. The colonel said he was going off to follow a particularly fresh-looking *spoor*, instructing us to remain till he returned, when we should find the other victim of the previous day's hunt.

It was quite delightful sitting there in the midst of the thorn jungle talking to Monica, even if I did notice presently that I was doing most of the babbling, that she had suddenly and unaccountably become silent, as if she had something on her mind.

The native boys were busy skinning the elephant under the direction of Kettles. We could hear them chattering in their unintelligible *Xosa* tongue, though we could not see them through the small intervening thicket. Monica had fallen silent again. So, a little jealous because I imagined she might be regretting her tiff with Kettles, I excused myself to go over and snap a photograph of the skinning process.

I left her sitting in a little clearing with her back against a *speckboom*. I wasn't gone five minutes, for Kettles was busy and uncommunicative. Yet when I returned Monica had disappeared!

"Miss Millet! *Monica!*"

I shouted in shrill agony.

No answer came back from the still bush. Then I thought I heard a rustle of leaves. My imagination was playing tricks with me.

I stood staring stupidly at the spot where she had been sitting. Terrifying visions of the bush rose up. I thought of soft-footed elephants, of snakes, of the rarely seen but dangerous *rooikats!* And of leopards! Yes, there were leopards in the Kafra Bush; the colonel had shot one, a black leopard.

"What's the matter?"

The quiet voice startled me. I turned and saw Kettles. He stood there in what Monica had called his stock-yard apron. He had a pair of tweezers in one hand and a large-bladed knife in the other.

"Monica—Miss Millet—is gone! Lost in the bush!" I told him simply.

HOURS and hours we searched the thorn jungle.

Well, perhaps not *quite* that long. But each minute seemed an endless hour of torment and anxiety.

With me, it was that way. How Kettles felt, I don't know. He must have suffered tortures—from the bloodless, icy-eyed look of him as we separated.

He had been strangely cool after that first shock—my dull-voiced announcement that Monica was lost in the bush. Anybody else but cold, haughty Frisbee Kettles —with that everlasting impermeable well-bred armor of his—would have lost his head. Especially if it was the girl he had rudely quarreled with, the girl he had put on a high pedestal and who had come leaping down, shattering all his illusions. For it *was* that way with Kettles. I could see it in his eyes.

I know I lost my head completely. It was Kettles who ran back and got a native boy for each of us and who ordered me, with the boy as guide, to search in one direction while he searched in another.

"She may have thought she could find the colonel's other elephant," he said hopefully. "We all heard the colonel say it was —over there." He sort of swept his arm sideways.

"You work along in that direction off to the right," he went on. "My boy and I will start from here and try to pick up her *spoor*. Look! There's the print of a small shoe. I think we can follow it. But let's not take chances. You beat up the bush over there. She may get twisted and turned in the bush."

I nodded. I rather admired his coolness, the way he took charge. Off I went with my boy. I wasn't very hopeful.

It was like hunting for the fabled needle in the haystack. I was lost myself. But my guide, while rather terrified at the bush in general, seemed confident of knowing this particular locality. He told me in his small stock of English words that he had been with Colonel Tottemley when the two elephants were killed the day before.

This encouraged me. Of course, now that I thought of it, the efficient Kettles probably had chosen him for just that reason. The boy's name was Shilling. My brain, knocked helter-skelter, lingered over that. It seemed so ludicrous. They all took funny names like that—Shilling and Sixpence and Ninepence and Bye'n'bye and Banana. I smiled—then stopped, for I began thinking of little Monica again.

HOURS and hours after—well, a long time to me, anyway—Shilling suddenly stopped and grunted. We had been going for some distance along a sort of natural path and our progress on the soft earth was noiseless.

"*Baas!*" he whispered, pointing.

I leaned forward and peered through an opening in the thick bush. I started. Dimly I could see the huge gray shape of an elephant! It seemed to be standing in a little clearing, feeding. The bush was thick round about, screening most of his bulk.

A cold chill ran down my spine. I was unarmed. Then Shilling plucked at my coat sleeve. He was grinning, and pointing again.

Off to the right of the motionless brute, hidden behind a thick undergrowth, I saw the black scraped heads of three or four native boys. I stifled a gasp. They, too, were motionless, and though vision was difficult through the dense foliage, I thought I saw them grinning.

Shilling seemed to have a private joke. He seemed attracted by the vague outlines of the feeding elephant. I looked again.

Was it my imagination? Was there something wrong about that elephant?

God bless my soul! The browsing elephant seemed poised at a most unnatural angle. He looked as if he might fall over any minute! I looked again. Was I crazy—or did I see something propped up against the "off" side of that elephant?

You wouldn't think ladders were much use hunting elephants. But Colonel Tottemley always had his boys carry a couple of ladders when he went hunting in the bush. He told me he had to have them in tracking the huge beasts—leaned them up against swaying bush or *speckboom* and balanced himself on them—the only way he could get a long-distance view over the thorn jungle—for you *can't* climb a *speckboom.*

As this flashed over my badly perplexed mind, I heard, off to the left, a rustling and then a cry.

"*Baas*, speak nothings!" warned Shilling in a whisper. He crouched behind a bush and I, not knowing why, followed suit.

That cry I had heard went right through me. It sounded like Monica's voice.

Then it happened!

A shrill cry of terror! Monica's voice—and quite near. The next second I saw her, as if she had dropped from nowhere, cowering in the bushes straight in front of me, to the left of the elephant! The bush hid us completely, but through a rift in the foliage I could see her.

I was just about to jump up and run for her—when I heard a great crackling of underbrush behind her.

"Oh, Fris! Fris! *Frisie!*" It was a shriek of agony. "Save me! Look! He's charging!"

And then came Frisie!

With a silly, useless shotgun!

Dashing out of the bush, wild-eyed, heroic—he leaped in front of the fleeing girl. Up went his ridiculous shotgun. He coolly told me afterward he could just dimly see the great gray menacing shape of the ferocious brute—and wasn't it fortunate, downright Fate and Destiny and that sort of thing, that he'd been able to track poor little Monica right up into the face of death?

Pop! Pop! Both barrels went off.

It sounded fearfully inadequate—for an *elephant*. But the obliging mammoth, probably too surprised and stricken to utter a sound, dropped in his tracks! There was the most frightful crash of bushes as the gigantic bulk collapsed. I wondered dully if the ladders had been damaged.

Then, like a cheeky spy, I watched the whole performance.

Monica had come up to us. She leaped at Kettles and threw her arms around his neck.

"Oh, Frisie! Frisie! My brave boy! You've saved me!"

Her voice, full of happy thrills, tapered off. She hid her small head on his shoulder and I thought I caught a sob.

What rotten melodrama! The fickle little devil!

"My darling!"

That's all Kettles said. But the *way* he said it as he kept a tight clutch on her!

It looked like a reunion of long-separated lovers—torn apart by cruel parents or war or some other cataclysmic thing. They stood in the bush cooing at each other. I heard another sob from Monica. Perhaps, though, it was a laugh. Now that I think of it—on sober afterthought—I'm almost sure it was a laugh.

Really, it was a sacrilege to hide there and listen to their conversation. I am quite certain that Monica, far-seeing in so many, many things, never intended I should have a front-row seat at her private drama.

The boy Shilling was grinning. I glared at him. Was he in it, too?

Presently Kettles marched off, with Monica on one arm and his absurd pop-gun on the other. Straight toward the camp they went. Not so much as a gloating examination of the doubly dead elephant. (Poor beast—he had died *twice;* once for government extermination purposes, and once for love!) The couple who owed the elephant so much didn't even look back. Not even Kettles. I wondered how much *he* knew. Too eternally well bred to say—*ever.*

What was it he said to me in the tent that night?—anybody with intelligence could see through a woman's game! Well, I thought, in a fit of savage unkindness, he'd got his parasite all right—or the parasite had got him.

To let off steam, I bawled a lot of hard language at the unoffending Shilling.

Then, feeling better, I resolved to heap coals of fire secretively on Monica's head. Threading my way through the bush past the stiff carcass of the dead elephant, so lately a bit of very successful scenery in a puppet show, I found the native boys giggling in their hiding-place. And ungrudgingly—for my lost Monica's sake!—I gave them a coin apiece, the tips they had earned.

Monica, I suppose, splendid stage-manager that she was, had quite forgotten it is customary to tip the stage-hands!

Sentiment, however, stopped right there. I firmly decided Kettles would have the pleasure of walking those nine miles back to camp, getting what comfort he could out of hanging on to Monica's stirrup. *I* would ride Kettles' horse! And he did, and I did.

Jewels, particularly missing jewels, always pique the curiosity, and there will be a story about a strange gem

"The Buddha Pearl" By William McCloy

in December, which will keep your curiosity on edge until the last line.

All the world loves a parson—the right sort—and you'll find the type you like in

"Scared Stiff" By E. R. Punshon

Journey with this new missionary to Falling Water, where they have a sign reading "no use for medlars."

In December EVERYBODY'S—*out November 15th*

Have You Ever Met a Turtle?

Turtle-Doves

A Rare Mix-up and Some Very Rare Humor in This Story by the Author of "Plague of My Hearth," "Brooders" and "In Hell-Hole Swamp."

By Walter De Leon

REMEMBER me telling how Freda Tishaar, after leading the straight and narrow path of a tight-wire walker for twenty years in vaudeville, finally fell off, broke her ankle and married me? And how two years later at the age of thirty-nine she achieved the ambition of her life by accumulating a family, a girl baby, half of a set of twins furnished by another Swedish lady living near our farm in Jersey who had already two pairs of twins and no bank account?

Anyway, right from the start I and the Babe took to each other like Yap and Japan. Besides having about the same amount of hair and liking the same kind of music, I made an awful hit with her by calling her Babe, instead of the billing the preacher sprinkled over her after I lost an argument with friend wife.

It was like this; when the Babe was two weeks old I see she had wonderful fingers. So I say to Freda one night, "We got to get a piano. After twenty-two years of playing it in show-business I know most of the keys by their real names, even though for the last two years I ain't exercised my talents on nothing more melodious than a plow."

"You make more money playing a plow than you ever did a piano, eh, Billy?" Freda asks in her blond, unruffled dialect which, like her savings account, she kept uncontaminated and aloof.

"But," I go on like as if I hadn't heard her, "by practising hard and faithful, I figure I'll be able to recall enough technic to at least start Gwendolyn's musical education."

"Whose?" Freda asks, looking puzzled at a diaper I had hemmed up in a hurry one day.

"Gwendolyn," I answer firm, all set for the battle I knew was coming.

"You mean Christina," says my placid helpmeet.

"No, I mean our baby Gwendolyn. Gwendolyn Alys Renton," I explain, "after my sister and the biggest musical hit on Broadway."

"I tell you something, Billy," replies Freda, ripping out the hem. "Sisters is nice and shows is all right when they pay salaries, but fathers and mothers is better."

"Listen," I holler, "this baby's original parents was name Thelma and Olaf. You ain't going to hang a handle like that——"

"I ain't," she interrupts. "But I already fixed with the minister to christen her Christina Tishaar Renton; Christina for my mother, Tishaar for my father and Renton, that's you and me, Billy. I got special reason."

For the sake of appearance I argue a little while longer. But I don't really mean it. That "special reason" stuff has me stopped. From the day the Justice of the Peace had did his worst, the way Freda's hunches had worked out with profit wasn't hardly human. But that don't keep me from calling my daughter Babe.

Comes summer, and our hand-tilled fields is what the poets say purpling with a crop of eggplants. They was Freda's idea which I had knocked until our hired man, Cecil, a sturdy octogenarian who had forgotten more about farming than he ever could remember, had wised me that eggplants would bud and blossom contentedly without the excessive attention demanded by tomatoes, nursing a crop of which the year before had put a permanent wave in my back-bone. So without bothering to find out why Freda had chose eggplants, I had planted them because an idea which all winter had been gathering heat and moisture in my brain like a potato had suddenly sprouted.

This was the idea: I had about two thousand dollars laying off idle in the bank which I'd made farming because Freda had insisted on paying all the bills and expenses our first year on account of me being broke. That first year I had promised friend wife not to go back on the road playing vaudeville dates. And because I knew that to break it was the only way to break Freda's heart and happiness, that promise was as good as Canadian Government fives. But there hadn't been any promises extorted concerning me *investing* in the theatrical business.

SO I'D sent a letter to Max Hardblatt, the agent who used to book me in vaudeville for fifteen per cent. of my salary and a present on Yom Kippur, to keep his eye open for a likely looking musical comedy which I could buy an interest in with my money.

This show "Alys" I'd spoke of to Freda hadn't cost a nickel over fifty thousand to produce and, counting four or five road shows, it had turned in a profit of actually a million dollars in less than two years. Figure three or four per cent. of a million! If my two thousand berries could get me three or four per cent. of any pudding like that, I figured to stick the profits into a savings bank at another four per cent. and let it lay till the Babe grew up and chose the school she wished to be finished at.

I didn't say nothing to Freda about my idea. There ain't a greater pal or an easier wife in the world when you understand her, but the venturesome instincts that loosened up Isabella when Columbus told her how far he could travel on her diamond lavaliere is totally lacking in Freda. I figured to say nothing about it till I got a couple of box-office statements showing the money I was piling up for the Babe.

Well, as the hot weather comes on suddenly and the Babe's teeth come through not so sudden, one day I get a letter from Max to come up and look over a proposition. I hopped out next morning telling Freda I was going to New Brunswick, which I did and took a train to New York. Max introduces me to a Mr. Clupek, an ex-pants-cutter who had retired after getting his second government check for Army contracts, and who has gone into the show-business on account of what the income-tax eggs had did to his uninvested capital last year,

The show is named "The Turtle-Doves." I look over the score and listen to the story of the piece, getting more enthusiastic every minute. It all sounded immense to me, as good as "Alys." Question is, how much of an interest can I get for two thousand dollars?

"It'll take a swell production and a star comedian to put this junk over," I say.

"If a fifty-thousand-dollar production had been swell enough, you'd never got a chance to buy in," says Clupek.

"Who's going to do the comedy rôle?" I ask.

"Billy Keenon," says Clupek, proudly naming the very best.

"You couldn't get that tramp even if you *wanted* to ruin your show," I tell him. "Keenon's got a five-year contract with the Shuberts."

"And the Shuberts, not having a show for him, have loaned him to Mr. Clupek. I arranged it," says Max.

"How much of an interest can you arrange for me in case I go crazy with the heat and write a check for two thousand?" I ask.

We argue fluently till train time. Then I take Max aside, give him power of attorney and a check, and tell him to Versailles it till he gets me at least four per cent. I also tell him to put the papers in his safe until I can get up to New York again and pay him his commission.

That night as I'm dropping off to sleep the Babe decides to have another tooth, the second that week. After keeping the whole family awake—all but Freda—the entire night, the tooth finally come through at five-twenty-five, which give me just time to pull on my overalls and shut off the alarm-clock before building the fire for breakfast. And with what I know about the Babe's gums, I don't need no Ouija board to tell me another night is soon to be made hideous.

"Freda," I say wanly at breakfast, "you ain't looking so good. The heat's getting to you. And next month's going to be worse."

"How do you know?" Freda asks, buttering some toast.

"It's August," I say. "Remember last August? The coolest place on the farm was the kitchen oven. Why don't you go away to a seashore or up in some mountains—and take the Babe with you?"

"If I am gone, who will cook, Billy?"

"By eating potato salad and cold meat and iced coffee, things that don't need cooking, I and Cecil can manage," I say, figuring I'll be in New York watching rehearsals and Cecil don't eat much anyway.

Freda puts a perfect omelet on my plate and reaches me the salt. "I tell you something, Billy. I'm glad you say that. Now I think I go away for a while."

"Good," I say. "When?"

"Next week." She fills up my coffee cup.

"Where will I buy your ticket to?" I ask.

"I already got the ticket," says Freda, smiling gratefully.

"You already got it?" I say. "To where?"

"Sweden."

I look at her a second. She means it. "You got to quit frying pancakes these hot mornings, Freda. The heat's beginning to affect you. You——"

"Wait, Billy. I show you." She goes into her room and comes back with some legal-looking papers in a big envelope.

"See, here is my passport. And here is a letter from the Swedish consul. Here is the steamer ticket, and here——"

"The trouble with you," I cut in, "is that you lack what they call initiative. You depend on your husband's advice too much. Where's *my* ticket and passport?"

"I tell you something, Billy," Freda slings an athletic arm affectionately around my neck. "I don't think you going with Christina and me. I am going to visit my family and you don't speak the language."

"Family quarrels are the same in any language," I say. Then it hits me that with the long trip over and back and a month or two visiting with her folks, the Babe is liable not to know me when she returns. "Listen," I say, "I'm against it. It's a waste of good money."

"I use my own money for the trip," Freda tells me.

"There ain't no argument about that," I answer; "but even so, how can you think of taking the Babe aboard a heaving ship! With a mouthful of hesitating teeth, she's got enough troubles without staring seasickness in the face."

"I don't get seasick," friend wife replies.

"You got all your teeth, too," I answer, "but the Babe——"

"Listen, Billy; did you ever see a seasick baby on board a ship?"

"I never see anything aboard a ship except the ceiling and the port-hole," I have to admit.

"Next week I want you should sign these papers with me," Freda continues calmly. She's got our wedding certificate, the deed to the farm, the receipts from our tomato crop, my contract to supply capons to a wholesaler in Philly, an affidavit from the doctor saying Christina Tishaar Renton was born on such and such a date in his presence, and another affidavit saying I'm permanently engaged in pursuing agriculture.

"You forgot your book of press-clippings," I say. "Your dad will enjoy reading what a riot you was in Muskogee, Oklahoma."

Freda shakes her head. "My dad, he don't like show business."

"After raising a family of acrobats, you can't hardly blame him," I say. "But what's that got to do with dragging the Babe to the cold neutral shores of Sweden?

"I tell you something, Billy," she tells me, gathering her documents. "I think the trip do us all good."

She gives me a couple of very suspicious looks when I don't say anything to that. Generally I don't lie down so easy. And while I know what a wonderful time Freda will have visiting her family, if they can find anything in common to talk about after twenty years, still when I think of the peaceful time I'll have watching rehearsals of "The Turtle-Doves" while Christina is cutting the rest of her teeth, I'm afraid to tempt my luck by knocking it.

A WEEK later I was blue enough after watching friend wife and family drift down the Hudson, without I must see Thursty Campbell talking to the stage director when I walked into the hall where my troupe was busily perspiring. I've knew Thursty for fifteen years without once having our friendship do me any good.

Thurston Campbell was one of these scions of society that their families wish 'em well every place but around the home fires.

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Thursty's father hadn't got on to him till he almost graduated from the college where instead of poring over Greek and Latin he had burned a lot of midnight oil pouring in Scotch and Irish. He was tall, homely and smiling, with a trick of saying things that made them sound funny even if you hadn't been drinking with him. So after the faculty had swore at his cut-ups and his dad had swore off his up-keep, Thursty took his agile legs and educated brain into musical comedy where he only had to stay sober a few hours every evening.

After a couple of seasons he become such an attraction that he never would have had to move off Broadway if he could have remembered after his Saturday matinées that there was another show to be played the same day. He was one funny, classy comedian when he was right. When he wasn't, he was about as comical as a tie-up in the subway; which was why it had been years since any manager had trusted him with a part on Broadway.

"WHAT'S Thursty Campbell doing here?" I whisper to Clupek.

"The Shuberts got a play for Keenon and took him away from us. So I've signed up Campbell for the star part."

"You act like you inherited your money," I tell him. "Don't you know——"

"I know he ain't touched a drop in six months and he's give me to understand he's signed the pledge."

"Well, don't let that interfere with you engaging a good understudy, will you?" I say, smiling like everything is all right and I'm only kidding. And then I grab a taxi and chase up to Max Hardblatt's to tell him if he hasn't already signed the final papers with Clupek, *don't do it.*

"Max is up in Maine on his vacation," the stenographer informs me. "He left a note for you."

The note is short and pitty. It says everything has been attended to, the papers are in his safety-deposit box and he wishes me luck.

Thursty sees me when I drift back into the rehearsal hall. "Hello, Billy," he cries gladly in his high, clear voice. "By Gad, I'm delighted to see you. Do you recall the last occasion we frolicked together?"

"North Platte," I say, naming the moist spot in Nebraska where our tour had dissolved, owing me three weeks' salary. "When and how did *you* get out of there?"

"Next day, by train to Chicago. I looked all over for you."

"Funny you didn't see me; I followed the tracks most of the way."

I didn't leave Thursty till "The Turtle-Doves" broke in at New Haven. Consequently he went on right and the show went over with a wow. The second act needed a little fixing, but nothing that couldn't be done during the two months Southern tour the Shuberts arranged before bringing "The Turtle-Doves" into New York.

"Listen," I tell Clupek, the day the troupe started South, "there's one state you're going to play down there in the land of the boll-weevil which is poison to Thursty. There ain't anything from its traditions to its hookworms I haven't heard him cuss out categorically and frequent. To listen to him, all its good food and hospitality was extracted by Sherman. So the first time you see Thursty smiling genially with his mouth and at the same time you denote a searching, preoccupied look in his eyes, wire me. I used to be able to handle him." I shake hands with Clupek. "Good-by, old man," I say. "I'm going back to my farm and worry."

When I reached home I found a picture post-card from Freda. It showed a large, dismal shed on a lonely pier somewhere. There was a lot of Swedish printing on it from which I got the word "Quarantine." In friend wife's thin handwriting was the words, "Arrived here. Freda."

"Well," I say to Cecil, "that's better than coming right out flat and saying smallpox busted out on the trip over, ain't it?"

Cecil pulls his whiskers from a horizontal to a vertical position. "My goodness, boss, I wonder has the Babe caught it?"

"Caught what?"

"The smallpox!"

"You ain't trying to wish it on her, are you?" I lay my hand on a meat-ax suggestively.

"'Course not," Cecil squeals; "but babies, my goodness, babies is so susceptible."

A week later comes another picture card showing a range of ragged mountains rising from some restless-looking waves. On it was, "Christina has a double tooth. Freda."

"And for a couple of cents more, she could have wrote a letter telling if that double tooth was in front where it will disfigure the Babe, or back where it won't show," I say.

"Anyway," creaks Cecil, "the smallpox ain't interfering with her teething, is it?"

Before I can answer that, the phone rings.

"Telegram for Mr. Renton," says a voice.

"You're talking to him," I say, confident it's another wire from Clupek reporting the business "The Turtle-Doves" has been doing. So far there had been a nice little profit every week.

The telegram reads, "Campbell disappeared after ruining performance last night. Matinee sold out to-day. What shall I do? Signed, Clupek."

"Here's an answer," I gurgle into the phone after Cecil has picked me up off the floor. " 'Have couple bootleggers meet me at station. Arriving to-morrow morning.' Sign Renton. And send that collect," I tell the girl.

I stagger into the bedroom and start packing my grip. "Cecil," I say, "while I'm gone, guard them eggplants sedulously. Now that my nest-egg is as good as gone, and my wife and Babe is flirting with pock marks, if anything should happen to incapacitate our crop for the market, there'd be nothing left for me but to tie the Ford around my neck and jump into a deep river."

Clupek is waiting at the station with tears in his eyes and a couple of red-noses in a taxi. "One of these men says he saw Campbell early this morning," he sobs.

"I guess you must not drink the stuff you peddle," I tell the bird. "We'll take Mr. Clupek to his hotel, shake your friend and then you can lead me to the spot."

I pick up Thursty's broad trail, follow it all day and lose it clean just as the Sabbath chimes is sweetly stealing through the still Southern twilight. And I ain't had a mouthful to eat all day.

I find Clupek in his room with an ice-pack on his head and a telegram in his trembling fingers. All the wire says is that if Campbell isn't sober and in Atlanta for the Monday night show, all the future bookings of "The Turtle-Doves" will be canceled.

"You *got* to find him and straighten him out," Clupek groans.

"Listen," I say, kissing good-by to the Babe's higher education, "I can't go a step further on an empty stomach."

"You'll have to. The food in this hotel ain't eatable."

"Where do *you* eat?" I ask the hotel clerk a few minutes later.

"The Greek restaurant three blocks down the street," he answers. "I just sent a telegram up to your room, Mr. Renton."

"I'll get it when I come back," I tell him.

AT THE door of the restaurant, I see a crowd has collected around one of the tables. Penetrating a stream of Greeko-American syllables, I hear the high-pitched college-bred accents that could be so humorous in a bone-dry burg. I shove through the crowd and look at Campbell.

He is wonderfully lit, smiling of face and sparkling and effervescing of tongue and manner, but—and this is what made him unfit for stage purposes when the fusel-oil began percolating freely—his mind concentrated firmly on just one idea. This time the idea was plain for all to see. It was lying on its back on the table and wasn't nothing but a big Mississippi River turtle, weighing not much over sixty pounds, with a shell at least two feet across.

"Billy! Faithful Achates!" With that, Thursty falls on my neck, "Fate is so dextrous, Billy. Coincidently, she has sent me a mascot for our little operetta and a friend to share my glee!"

"Not so loud, Thursty," I beg. "Your language is attracting more attention than your breath."

The Greek says something very rough.

"My dear caterer," Thursty faces him; "but upon second thought that appellation is too euphemistic. My dear purveyor of victuals, were you in the least humane you would thank, not excoriate me for removing this mammal from the glass tank in the window of your victualry."

"Wait a minute," I say as the Greek opens his mouth, "what started all this?"

From the concurrent testimony of both principals and the surrounding ensemble I glean that Thursty, passing the restaurant, had seen the turtle trying to raise his head above the level of the water in the tank, which was too deep for him to do it. He had then dashed in indignantly and demanded to know how long the turtle had been in the tank. The proprietor, mistaking Campbell to mean how long had he had the turtle, told him eight days. Thursty,

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thinking the turtle had gone without air for eight days, immediately rushed over and pulled the turtle and a large quantity of water out of the tank.

"And, Billy," Thursty concluded, "the glance of gratitude and friendliness which Abraham, as I designate him, tendered me with his first long inhalation, I shall ever treasure in my memory. I desire to take the maltreated creature away with me; but for some hidden Hellenic reason the victualer objects."

"The turtle—she worth thirty dollars," shouts the Greek.

"Not to me," I say. "Here's ten."

"No! Twenty-five," he demands.

"Wrap up a couple of ham sandwiches on rye and I'll give you twelve," I compromise.

"Billy, old chum," Thursty interrupts, "while Abraham, in common with others of his species, is carnivorous to a certain extent, he would scarcely appreciate, I think, the savor of a prepared meat such as the ham."

"The only way this turtle gets these sandwiches is to fight me for them." The kidding smile I give Thursty hides a world of hate.

"Twenty dollars," bellows the proprietor.

"Where's the sandwiches?" I ask. Somebody hands them to me and I count out fourteen dollars on the counter. "Listen," I say so Thursty can't hear me, "I'm only renting the turtle. I'll return him in the morning and get back this deposit."

THURSTY is earnestly explaining the lives and manners of the species to his volunteer audience. "Come on," I say. "Your friend looks tired. Let's I and you put him to bed." I know if I can get Thursty to accept that idea, he'll go to the hotel with me. Once there, I know a couple of tricks to get him into bed for the long sleep he needs to keep little Christina from growing up illiterate.

"Billy," says Thursty, rising to the bait, "your devotion and Gibraltar are the two immovable things in a seething, uncertain world." Before I could call a taxi, he picked up the turtle, slung it flatways under his long arm and reeled triumphant out of the restaurant.

By the time we reached the hotel, it took the parade behind us twenty minutes to pass the given spot where Thursty and I were debating whether a Turkish bath wouldn't be a better place to park Abraham. The turtle decided it by slipping out of Thursty's hands and waddling into the lobby.

Campbell recovers him, and with the eyes of everybody in the lobby on him he asks the clerk for his key.

"You're not thinking of taking the turtle to your room, are you, Mr. Campbell?" says the clerk, very grouchy. I learned later he was still sore from some ground and lofty kidding Thursty had pulled on him the night before.

"And, prithee, why not?" smiles Thursty.

"It's a rule of the hotel that no dogs or animals be allowed in the rooms."

"My dear chap, science has determined the turtle or tortoise—the Latin nomenclature escapes me for the moment—to be a reptile. Furthermore, Abraham is my friend. Is there any law to prevent me from taking a friendly reptile to bed with me?"

The laugh that pulls from the bunch around the desk turns the clerk red.

"I don't know who you're kidding," he says. "You can't take that turtle to your room."

"A most unpremeditated decision," Campbell replies solemnly, "which forces me to prove that I *can* take him to my room." He starts for the elevator.

"You don't want me to phone the police, do you?" asks the clerk, moistening his lips.

"Police! An excellent idea!" Thursty places Abraham on the floor and holds him down with his foot while reaching for the telephone.

"Listen," I plead, "why not go to the baths——"

"No, Billy. For the benefit of the traveling public let us settle this controversy legally." He gets his connection. "Sergeant, kind sir, will you send a patrol wagon to the Continental for a homeless Thespian and a sleepy turtle who have been denied the privileges of this hostelry?"

I grab the phone out of his hand. "Listen—" but the sergeant interrupts to ask who it was had been talking.

"That was Thurston Campbell, the comedian," I explain.

The sergeant laughs. "Oh, him! Well, you tell him to take his turtle and go to bed."

The face of the hotel clerk, who had been listening in, turns a violent mauve which fades to a flat white at the yell the gang around the desk gives when I give Thursty the sergeant's message.

The yell also wakes up the hotel cat. She yawns and stretches. The slow curving of her tail in front of his eyes annoys Abraham. He ejects his head from his shell and successfully snaps at said tail. With wild, affronted leaps the cat streaks it for the door. On the way she gets hopelessly tangled up in the feet of a prim young lady who stumbles, shrieks and shoves the handle of her umbrella through the glass cigar case. Abraham hastens over to apologize, whereat the blonde behind the counter drops her magazine, picks up her skirt and climbs on top the counter emitting shrill squeals.

And then Thursty, dashing protectingly after his pet, loses his footing on the tiled floor and sits suddenly and completely on Abraham's broad back, to the loud sustained laughter and applause of a delighted populace.

"I've got him now," says the clerk grimly, reaching for the phone. "Disturbing the peace. Police Headquarters? Send the wagon around, sergeant."

THERE ain't no human could describe the different emotions which surged and slumped inside me all through the rest of that long night. In the first place, Thursty refused to get into the wagon without Abraham. In which he was enthusiastically backed up by the night clerk.

Down at the jail, while the sergeant was making the entry on the blotter, the turtle nipped the hind leg of the sergeant's little fox-terrier, which decided the sergeant not to accept any bail. So Thursty, clinging to Abraham, was thrown into a pen occupied by four or five blind-tiger victims. They unanimously inaugurated an insurrection designed to annihilate the two newcomers. They nearly succeeded before the turnkey formed a rescue party and delivered Thursty and Abraham to the security of a small single cell with a cot in it.

"Valhalla! Likewise Eureka!" shouts Campbell. "A bed, at last!" He carefully lays the turtle on the cot and covers him. Then, sitting on the floor beside him, he begins yodelling a plaintive Swiss lullaby. When Abraham refuses to go to sleep, in clarion tones Thursty diagnoses his restlessness as a natural craving to be immersed in water. Thursty's feelings have been so hurt by the unrestrained criticisms of the other inmates that he won't speak to anybody but me.

So, to quiet him, I hunt up the turnkey. "Listen," I say, "I've got to have a large wash-tub half-filled with lukewarm water."

The turnkey looks at me, smiles pleasantly, opens a door and says, "Right in here, brother." A second later the slam of the door and the snap of the lock tell me I'm in for the night, too.

And while I eat the dry crums and the warped meat of my sandwiches, I begin worrying what's in the telegram waiting for me at the hotel. Has a blight struck my eggplants, or has Cecil received a picture card from Freda showing a well-filled cemetery, and saying the Babe is holding her own against Swedish smallpox?

It ain't so easy to think straight on account of the disturbance Thursty was creating. He was entertaining Abraham by giving imitations of the ways different prominent men would deliver Lincoln's address at Gettysburg. Beginning with Adam, he had jumped to Moses, in dialect, and was whole-heartedly working his way down through history when he came to Demosthenes. At the top of his lungs he was hollering for me to bring him a pebble to put under his tongue so as to make the imitation artistic, when the turnkey slipped quietly down the hall to Thursty's cell, reached in with his heavy night-stick, once—and then we all went to sleep.

Next morning Campbell was still sleeping when I got out and began fixing things. First I talked to the manager of the hotel. Together we visited the Greek. Then the three of us looked up Judge Smith who wore the same kind of a pin in his buttonhole as I and the hotel manager and Thursty. The ways is all greased to slide Thursty out of dry dock when I get back to the jail—and take the knock-out punch Fate has been saving for that moment!

Not only will there be no show that night, but there won't be any Tuesday or Wednesday. *Thursty's voice is gone*—wore out with "four-score years and ten" and sleeping on a concrete floor. And little Christina's money has vanished along with it.

Before I can get to Judge Smith to tell him it's all off and please give Thursty a hundred years, the case has been called.

"As I understand it, the prisoner was arrested because he insisted it was his privilege to escort a turtle or tortoise to his room."

"Yes, your Honor."

"Umm. So far as it lies within the knowledge of this Court, there is no law written upon the statute books of this sovereign state which denies an individual the right to take a turtle to bed with him, if he so desires and the turtle be complaisant. Umm. Case dismissed."

On the way back to the hotel Campbell and I don't talk any. He can't, and the words I want to use ain't been invented yet.

"Where's the telegram that came for me last night?" I ask the clerk. He separates me from three dollars and fifteen cents before giving me the wire.

> Dear boss, Christina ain't got the smallpox at all, but My Goodness your wife was surprised to not find you here. I done the best explaining I could, but maybe you better come home soon.
>
> Yours truly, Cecil Herringworth.

I've got just time to send a wire to Cecil to meet me with the Ford at New Brunswick next morning, before the conductor yells "all aboard."

TWENTY-TWO hours in a day coach with only enough money to buy peanuts ain't so comical; but it's ease and luxury to twenty-two hours of wondering what Freda and the Babe thought when they looked around the farm and found me out squandering two thousand dollars worth of schoolbooks and hair ribbons.

Next morning, stepping off the train, the only thing that greets me is the humidity. I stick around half an hour and then start hiking the twelve miles to the farm.

As mile after mile slowly melted behind me, it was drove into my consciousness with every painful step that I'd had more contentment and love and good cooking in the last two years than all my previous forty-four put together. Grand old Freda, with her calm, generous ways had had to go away before I'd really appreciated how wonderful she'd wifed me. For every drop of perspiration that rolled off my heated dome, I shed an inward tear of shame for not realizing that the simple, bucolic life she had led me was beyond compare, compared to unsubstantial, double-crossing theatrical exsitence.

When I farthermore realized how I had deceived an innocent babe, a babe which was legally by adoption mine to have and to hold and cherish, all of which there wasn't nothing I'd rather do, a firm determination formed in my chest: which was, that the next guy who mentioned show business to me was going to die a murdered death.

And when I finally reach the farm, Freda ain't there! Nobody is there; only Olga, our goat, and she never did like me.

It's depressing dusk, when far down the road I hear the familiar rattles and creaks of the old Ford. For an hour I've had the table set, the teakettle boiling on the stove, the bread and cold meat sliced, a bottle warming for the Babe—and no appetite.

Cecil drives the car to the garage and Freda opens the door.

"Hello, Freda," I say.

"Hello, Billy," says Freda, and I'm a Chinaman if she ain't smiling her regular good old happy smile. And when she runs over, slams an acrobatic kiss on my trembling lips, puts the Babe in my arms and says, "I tell you something, Billy; I'm glad we all get home," I bust out into tears like an ordinary woman. But when I start spilling the whole works to her she stops me.

"Listen, Billy, I know all about it. I saw Max Hardblatt to-day after I put Christina's money in the bank."

"Christina's money!" I echo. "*What* money?"

"The money I go over to Sweden to get for her." She smiles. I just look at her dumblike.

Freda takes a bottle of milk from the icebox and starts mixing up some French pancake batter. "You remember I told you my father he don't like show business. He used to own a circus over there till one day he buy some land in Russia that's got oil afterwards. Then he retires."

She slaps a big frying-pan on the stove and greases it.

"He wants all us children should retire, too. But we don't want to. So he says to my two sisters and me, 'Girls, I got lots of money and you don't get none of it. But any time before I die, if you quit the stage and marry a man *who has got nothing to do with theatrical business*, I give money to the babies. If neither of the parents is theatrical, I give twenty thousand dollars to my first grandchild and ten thousand dollars to next six."

Freda pours a heaping ladle of creamy batter into the sizzling pan.

"My sister Velma marries an actor. She got no children anyway. Last year my youngest sister she marries rich young banker. I think she is going to get money from papa pretty soon. But when I show my father little Christina and the picture of you, Billy, plowing our farm, he is so happy he writes out check for the twenty thousand dollars and two more checks for two thousand dollars on account the baby is name Christina and Tishaar. And when I tell him how we got the baby, he laughs a long time and then cries a little, and then writes another check for me to put away for a dower when Christina grows up to get married."

"But, Freda," I moan, sick all over at what I've got to say, "didn't Max tell you? *I went back into the business!*"

FREDA spreads some butter and home-made jelly between the cakes and sprinkles sugar and cinnamon on the top one. "I tell you something, Billy. Don't be mad, please; but before I go to Sweden I have a talk with Max. He told me what you are going to do. I find out how much commission he will make from you. Then I ask him will he take from me twice as much to tear up your check and find another sucker. I—I got your check in my purse, Billy."

"Freda! You mean—the two thousand I thought I was investing for the Babe is safe in the bank?"

Freda nods yes and then stares at me peculiar. Slowly she says: "Billy, you mean that? Nobody told me. You mean you risk all the money you work so hard for—for Christina?"

"You didn't think I was doing it for Cecil, did you?"

Bam! goes the bread-knife on the floor as Freda wraps both arms around my neck and hugs me till the coffee boils over and saves my life.

"Billy, I tell you something," she whispers a minute later, her eyes shining warm and misty, "from now on, I think we are going to live here on the farm happy like—like turtle-doves."

I give her a quick look. I see she don't mean nothing underhanded, and anyway just then Cecil comes in and hands me a letter he's been carrying around for a couple of days. It's from a wholesaler who wants my entire crop of self-grown eggplants. And when I look at the price he offers, I see where if Thursty *never* gets his voice back the Babe is going to get one grand piano for her first birthday.

The Autumn

By DuBose Heyward

GIVE me a day where your colors break
Billow on billow across the lea;
Where the trees lift restless arms and shake
Showers of rubies over me:
And the heart is free—free.

Grant but a little hour or two
In an open space where my blunted gaze
May travel your golden leagues anew,
And soar to the stars as it used to do
In the old, unfettered days.

Show me a sweep of October sky
Stark and far; while the goldenrod
Sends breakers of splendor coursing by.
And oh, I think that I need not die
To find my way to God.

Everybody's Magazine, November, 1921

A Serial of Love,

“What is it?” she exclaimed, and turned to catch her reflection in a mirror. She saw herself i
David carefully pronounced the words, “The w

SACRIFICE

Illustrations

LILLA DELLIVER and Lawrence Teck, an explorer, had been married one day, and the next Teck had returned to Africa. The illness of an aunt kept Lilla from accompanying him. A few days later Aunt Althea passed peacefully away. Two months later Lilla heard that Teck had been slain by savages.

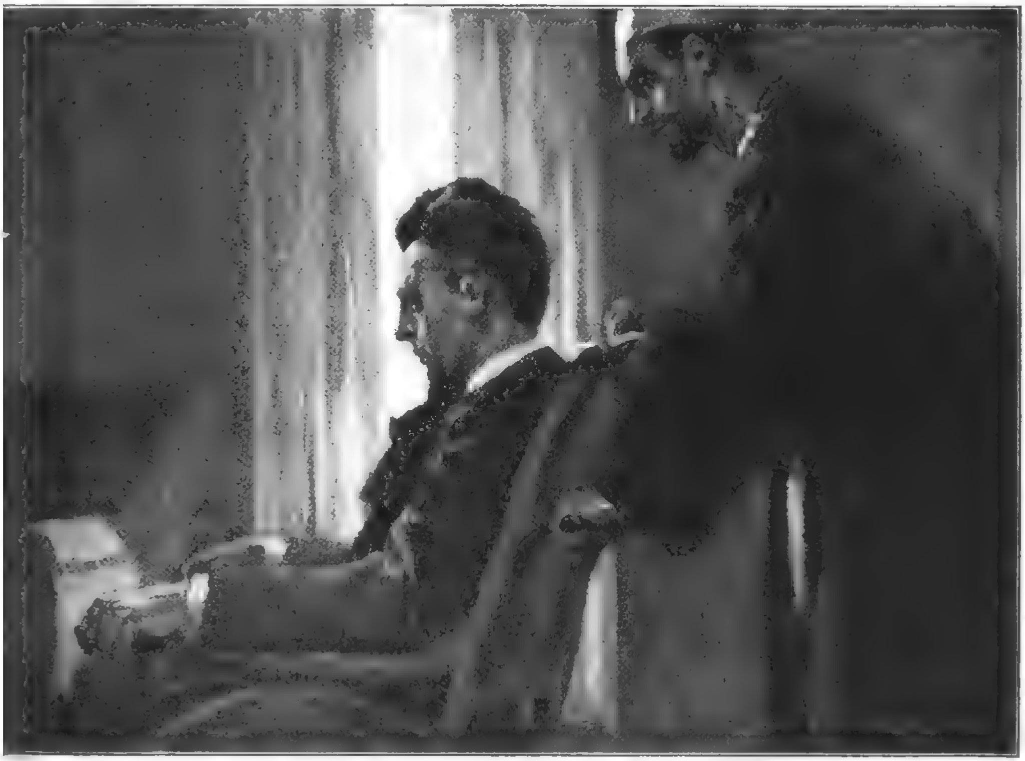
There immediately rose before Lilla the strange vision that Madame Zanidov had related to her on the night that she had met Lawrence Teck. The Russian had said that she saw a picture of black savages around a body covered with a cloth; she felt that it was some one who had loved Lilla.

Lilla Accomplishes a Remark-
Fallows Gives Himself Credit.
Freedom from an Equa-

Lilla’s inheritance from neurotic parents and her own abnormal upbringing made the ordeal harder for her. Teck had gone after showing her that it was he, of a world full of men, for whom she had been waiting. She never expected her great loneliness to pass.

She brooded over the details of his death. There had been a sharp conflict between Teck’s party and the savages. She could

ysticism, Adventure



s aspect also, white and a little wild. One of her shoulder-straps had slipped down across her arm.
ock, wasn't it?" "Yes. He brought me bad news."

By Stephen French Whitman

by E. Hopper

able Cure for Which Dr.
Lawrence Teck Wins His
torial African Savage King

hear the yells, could see the spears flying. In her abnormally sensitive mind was planted the impression that he had been stabbed in the right side above the hip. And when she consulted a specialist in the hope that he could relieve her depression, the doctor found on her slender right side above the hip a red mark like a spear-wound. He cured her sleeplessness, managed to give her some relief.

That winter she went to the opera and to the musicales at the home of Brantome, a friend, whom she had known from childhood. Teck was slipping farther and farther into the past.

At Brantome's she met David Verne, a frail young man, an invalid, who was carried about in a wheel-chair. From Brantome she heard his story. He had been a promising composer. Just when most had been expected of him there had been a love-affair and a disappointment, and the nervous shock had been followed by an insidious disease which made him an invalid. This and the great bitterness that filled his heart had halted his progress in music.

Brantome talked at length to Lilla of woman's power of inspiring artists. The idea fascinated her more and more as David Verne fell in love with her.

"If you had appeared sooner, the music I might have written!" he said sadly.

Lilla began to look upon him as her hero; she pictured herself as inspiring this man to create a masterpiece. Verne's health improved and he again took an interest in his work.

Then Parr, Teck's valet, returned. Lilla heard from him the story of her husband's travels. For the time being her mind returned to the loved one who had been slain by savages. She read books about the country he had been exploring; she even desired to learn Arabic. So Parr employed Hamoud-bin-Said, who was typical of his kind, lacking in energy and discipline, to give her lessons.

And then Cornelius Rysbroek returned, the same Cornie whose suit Lilla had so often rejected. This time he returned from the wilds; he had been there in imitation of the other—the one who captured Lilla despite him. Lilla was overjoyed. She invited him to dine with her.

AS FOR David Verne, despite the extraordinary prostration in which Lilla had found him, it seemed that he had not passed beyond the vivifying powers of love, which sometimes appear to change the body, as well as the mind, into a new organism for a while. Week after week, to the bewilderment—one might almost say the consternation—of the physician, he refused to imitate the customary progress of his disease. And while he acknowledged that this phenomenon must presently end, David knew that, for the moment, at any rate, love had proved stronger than death.

To prolong these hours in the transfigured world of sense! To steal from oblivion one more summer of which she would be the warmth, the fragrance, the unprecedented beauty!

Inevitably all this fervor and pathos, gratitude and adoration, were transmuted into a consciousness of music. He felt ever more strongly the artist's need of expression. Since he had never previously known such exaltation—or, indeed, such dejection—the music that he finally produced, his physical weakness notwithstanding, was music such as he had never written before.

At Brantome's, when that piece was to be played for the first time, he sat in his wheelchair suffocated by sudden doubts, as if on trial for his life. But Lilla sat beside him, her hand on his. No one else was there except Brantome, who bent over the manuscript, his haggard old face revealing nearly as much agitation as David's.

At last, raising his head, the critic murmured: "You think this is going to be easy for me? Reflect on what I must do. To satisfy you I must take the rigidity out of all these ink-marks, restore to this score the emotions that you felt in writing it."

David responded: "The emotions that I felt in writing it are not there, for the idea always loses its original form the moment it is seized by the pen. That is the first loss. The second comes now. You cannot help it. It is the old misfortune, the inability to transmit what one feels, the isolation of the human soul. But nobody could play as well as you what's left of those thoughts of mine."

The bullet-headed attendant stood beside the wheel-chair, a bottle of medicine and a glass of water in his hands. With that pretentious solicitude of his, he uttered, "It is time——"

David Verne gave a shudder. "Ah! At this moment! Will you get out of the room?" And when the attendant had gone, "Is he, can he be, so stupid? I really think he does these things on purpose."

Brantome poised his hands above the keyboard, leaned forward to peer at a legend scrawled faintly in the corner of the page, then, turning round on the piano-bench, cast at Lilla, "Rose-covered Cypresses."

"What?" she exclaimed, with a start.

"He has called it that."

And he began to play.

David Verne had come nearer, this time, to that "absolute music" of his dreams, that freedom from all limitations hitherto imposed, which Beethoven, once or twice, for a moment, had expressed with an effect of perfect liberation. Not a song after all, but a piano concerto, it described in tone that goal of all human longings, the conquest of tragedy. It was the utterance of a man who having had his life transformed by love must soon leave that love behind him; this glory that had descended upon his sadness was such a glory as fills the sky for a little while before the inrush of dusk.

At the conclusion, it was as if in the gorgeousness of a sunset the roses covering the cypresses had become a mist of rare hues, behind which those trees emblematic of mourning almost lost their significance. At last, however, one felt that the light was fading, that the somber silhouettes of the cypresses were more visible than their poetic embellishment. And finally, with the darkness, a breeze seemed to bring a long sigh from those elegiac branches, together with a perfume of the roses that had become unapparent, wet with dew as if with innumerable tears.

After a long silence, Brantome lifted his burly old body from the piano-bench, came to stand before David, then abruptly turned away.

"You have done it. It is all your promises fulfilled," he said, as he went out of the room without looking back. But it was Lilla whose arm he touched in passing.

David Verne sat gazing before him, his sunken eyes shining in his face of a sick young Apollo in bronze. But soon, turning his eyes toward Lilla: "You! All you!"

She gathered his hands against her bosom with a movement that imparted to him the life so violently pounding in her heart—the pride and the hope, perhaps even a little of the defiance and belief. She gave him a look that pierced the caverns of his brain, where his faith in death resided blackly, with a white-hot faith in life.

"Have you forgotten," she breathed, "that a little while ago you would have called this impossible?"

"Too much!" he whispered, peering at her, with a dreadful longing, across the chasm that lay between her will and his mesmeric terror of extinction.

"No! You shall see!"

She felt that this must be the object of her lifelong wishes and antipathies, that her sense of the preciousness of mortal life and beauty, and her hunger for participation in the development of both were instincts intended to make her indomitable now. Suddenly she had one of those rare moments when the will is so strengthened by a feeling of worthy purpose that it becomes tremendous, and everything opposed to it seems as good as vanquished. It was with an accent of accomplished victory that she repeated, "You shall see!"

And now, indeed, the drowning man clutched at the flower that epitomized the dear world.

"Lilla! Lilla! Never let go of my hands! Yes, it's true; while I hold them I hold fast to life; but if you let go of them in that moment I shall go tumbling down into the pit. Do you realize that by this time I should probably be already gone, if you hadn't appeared? I am a dead man who lives, who even does his work, because of the hold of these slender hands of yours. Never let go!"

In that clutch of his, all at once so strong despite his feebleness, Lilla found no sinister portent. She was thinking, "Death conquered me once; but now I shall conquer Death."

NEXT day, when a maid announced that Hamoud-bin-Said was waiting in the library, Lilla felt that the time had come to "stop that nonsense." Her desire to learn Arabic now seemed to her an absurd caprice; and once more she had reason to wonder at her swift passage from one enthusiasm to another, her intense preoccupation with things that suddenly became insufferable. She entered the library dressed and hatted for the street, pulling on her gloves; and while occupied with her glove-buttons said calmly, in her enchanting voice:

"I'm going to be very busy for a while. I suppose I ought to have given you a little notice; so I'm writing you a check for two weeks' lessons."

Hamoud stood before her, tall and spare, in a new black-alpaca suit as incongruous-looking as the old one. He made no response at once, and there was no change in his perfectly chiseled tan features; but for all his impassiveness he managed remarkably to convey the impression that an immense calamity had befallen him.

Lilla felt a twinge of compunction, as she reflected: "Who in this town except myself would ever take Arabic lessons? Poor young caliph! Now he must work or starve."

She added, aloud: "In fact, you've been such a good teacher that I ought— Well, haven't I made great progress?"

He raised his eyes, and a bitter smile appeared on his gemlike lips. He replied in Arabic:

"It is a difficult language, madam. Perhaps you understand what I am saying now because I am speaking very simply and slowly. But you yourself can speak only the most ordinary phrases; and I doubt if any one but I could understand you. However, why should you trouble to learn this language of mine? It always seemed folly to me. It is just a part of this life, which has little meaning except to thoughtless persons, and in which, to the wise, all events are like the shadows of passing birds."

Her pride was affronted; and yet it was not as if an inferior had rebuked her. He picked up his hat, a frightful confection of tan-and-yellow straw, and the text-book out of which she had learned—in Heaven's name, why!—the facts that *el* and *al* are assimilated before dentals, and that *elli* is omitted after general substantives. Hamoud-bin-Said inclined his handsome head, while concluding,

"You will soon forget all you have learned from me, and I shall have received your money for nothing." His impassiveness was deranged by a look of chagrin, as he blurted out harshly, "I regret that the money also has flown away, or I should insist——"

He held his head high, as if trying to rise above his feeling of degradation.

Lilla stood looking at him thoughtfully from under the edge of a verdigris-colored turban that matched the high collar of her walking-suit. She was reluctant to let him drift away to some obscure, wretched fate, to which his native apathy would surely direct him. She perceived in him again a certain relationship to herself, a relationship due not only to his past good fortune, but also to something in his character—perhaps some subtle likeness of enthusiasms, or even some identical kind of ardor, or else some weakness that had ruined him but had not yet ruined her. So it was with a blush that she suggested,

"See here; an invalid friend of mine is dissatisfied with the man who takes care of him——"

When she had made herself clear, his face turned brick-red, and for an instant his eyes were terrible. One would have said that some ancestor uncontaminated by Zanzibar, some true Arab of Omân, stood there in his place, flaming with outraged dignity. He cast back at her one more burning look before he stalked from the house.

The following week, when she had forgotten him, she found him, at twilight, in the black-and-white hall.

He looked utterly exhausted, as if he had tramped innumerable miles; and his face was as pale as death. He bowed humbly, muttering,

"Madam, if you will forgive, I am now ready to be the servant of that sick man."

SOMETIMES she tried to stand off as a spectator of her emotionalism, examine these new feelings. At any rate, she had found an object in life, had splendidly emerged from her old sensations of incompleteness and inferiority. No longer that morbid humility struggling in vain to transform itself into a violent self-assertion. Not since she had become the virtual creatrix of beauty, even the giver of life!

And David, because she owed so much to him, became every day more precious. She returned less and less often to the little house in Greenwich Village, where Parr, escaped from his crutches, sat in a chintz-covered chair, a cane between his knees, his white head lowered, still dreaming of "those good days."

"You're better, aren't you? What does the doctor say now? Is there anything you need here?"

Her eyes, avoiding his look of humble devotion, roamed over the walls, as if she were considering the advisability of more Della Robbia plaques. The niece, with her sleek brown bandeaux and fifteenth-century profile, passed noiselessly through the hall, and presently a smell of cooking entered the sitting-room.

"As late as that?"

Lilla drove up-town, heaped her arms with flowers, entered the rooms to which Lawrence Teck had led her on the night of their marriage.

The characteristic odor of the place—the odor of skins and sandalwood, camphor and dried grasses—nearly stifled her. In the gloom she saw the savage weapons gleaming. Then the shadow of clustered tom-toms against the bedroom door made her heart stand still. As if to exorcise a ghost that she no longer dared to meet, still clutching the mass of tributary blossoms to her breast, she tore the window-curtains apart. The sunset struck in like a sword-blade, relentlessly cleaving through the veils of time. Dust lay over everything. On the center-table in the polished gourd, a bouquet of winter roses stood rigid, brown, like the lips of mummies, dry enough to crumble at a touch.

Standing there in her modish suit so cunningly devised to emphasize her charms, with the flowers slipping from her arms to the dusty rug, she wept at the vagueness of her recollections, the fading-away of grief.

"Why do I keep this place up? It's dreadful that everything should be just the same here——"

She meant, "While I am so changed."

She went down-stairs intending to tell the janitor to give the rooms a cleaning; but she found him—a fat, undersized old fellow in a skull-cap—talking to a young man who had a leather portfolio stuck under his arm. As her eyes were red, and her voice no doubt still unsteady, she averted her head and passed quickly out to her car.

THOUGH a genius—at any rate according to Brantome—it was now David Verne, instead of Lilla, who suffered from the feeling of inferiority. To hold her, he had only his music, and perhaps his bodily feebleness that excited her compassion. Yet this feebleness, profound, insurmountable, was what caused his torments of jealousy.

The question was: How long would she be content with this wan sort of love?

And what did he know of her life during all the hours when she was invisible to him? What homage, what persuasions must she, with her peculiar loveliness, not be object of, out there in the world full of gaiety and vitality, where strength was always offering itself to beauty? It would be only natural, he thought, if one of those men should win her heart away, and she, out of pity, should pretend that nothing had happened.

For that matter, perhaps even now——

At last she understood why, when she entered the room, he sometimes transfixed her with that poignant questioning look. Then his appearance was the same as on the day of their first meeting, as though, at that dread, he had lost all the ground that she had helped him to gain.

"Oh, what folly!" she cried, aghast more at the change in him than at this injustice. "If you knew how seldom I see any one these days, except you!"

He remained lost in the fatal contemplation of the idea, his body sunk even deeper in the wheel-chair.

"And what's more, there never has been anybody else, except one——"

A gleam issued from the eyes of the poor wretch.

"I am not jealous of him," he affirmed, though not quite convincingly; since a man may be nearly as jealous of a departed rival as of a present one. "But every fellow that you know, who walks toward you in his wholeness and vigor, is my superior. Ah, my music; don't speak of it! What does all that amount to against those natural qualities, which I can never regain?"

His frail, handsome, bronzed young face expressed a puerile helplessness. And it was with a maternal pity that she reassured him, using words such as mothers find for children frightened by the dark.

"Forgive me, Lilla. But what do you expect? You are my life."

She reflected that beneath his weakness there was a strength perhaps greater than the strength of the strong; and now, at last, she thought of the clutch of the drowning.

Then, instead of meeting her always at Brantome's, he had himself wheeled to her house. Two or three times a week, as the summer advanced, he dined there, in the cream-colored room where Balbians and Dellivers of Andrew Jackson's day—and even a dandy by Benjamin West in a sky-blue-satin coat looked down from above the mahogany sideboards that were laden with Colonial glassware and old Lowestoft. The windows were open to the mews. They could hear the faint crash of a band that was playing a Strauss waltz in Washington Square.

She had not opened the Long Island house. As for David, he had a house of his own in a corner of Westchester County, inherited from his parents, who had been well-to-do. He told her about his family and his childhood—his feeling of strangeness amid persons who had thought him very queer, and had tried by every means to make him conform to their ideals of thought. "I was a sort of black sheep," he declared, "because some necessity compelled me to be myself. I could never get over my skepticism about a thousand things that seemed plain to those good folks. I was always that queer card—David Verne, in quest of a more expressive music in which harmony needn't be lost in rhythm."

The candles flickered before his hypersensitive face. The band in the Square continued to play Strauss's "Rosen aus dem Süden," with its old suggestions of agile grace, united movement, young men and maidens joyously dancing away toward kisses and laughter. The servants brought in the fresh course. Lilla cut up David's food, then held the fork to his lips; for the man who had scribbled that magnificent concerto could not lift his hands high enough to feed himself.

He faltered, "Your dinner will get cold."

"All the better, on such a hot night."

"Yes," he sighed; "you ought not to be here in this oven of a city."

"Oh, I!" she retorted, with moisture in her eyes.

In the drawing-room Hamoud-bin-Said paced to and fro, sometimes standing before the picture by Bronzino, and seeming to stare clear through it. He was serene, as water is serene that has been lashed by tempests, and that holds in the depths of its placidity secrets that none can discern. He was always near nowadays, on the fringe of their lives, just beyond the radius of their preoccupations, the silent witness of this strange love-affair, in the humble station that Allah, for some inscrutable reason, had decreed for him.

ONE night when she was expecting David to dinner, she turned round from arranging some flowers in a vase in the drawing-room to see Cornelius Rysbroek in the doorway. He had come, he declared, to "take her out somewhere, to give her a breath of fresh air and make her listen to reason."

"But I'm dining here, Cornie."

"Alone?"

"No."

Nevertheless he sat down with a dogged look.

"What's to be the end of this?" he demanded. "I suppose you know what a lot of chatter this nonsense of yours has stirred up. They're even saying that you're engaged to him. It's perfectly monstrous!"

It was his old tone of voice, throaty, quaintly didactic, precise from spite and yet muffled by rage; but it was not the same face. It was, instead, the face of a desperate, possibly dangerous man, who had brooded over this monomania in the gorges of the great Chinese river, in the filthy *yamens* of barbarous frontier cities, and under the shadow of snowy passes that rambled into Tibet, and then, rushing back to her, had been led by her greeting to believe that his miseries were ended. He had taken as his pattern the rival whom she had preferred. Yet now he must see her devoting herself to a man who was the antithesis of all that she had previously preferred.

It was unendurable! But how to escape it? By hating her? Yes; surely she was worthy of his hatred; heartless, cruel, the cause of all these innumerable torments.

"What do I see in you?" he said between his teeth.

She had on a copper-colored gown hung over her slender shoulders by two straps. Maybe because its hue was a deeper shade of the same color as her hair, her eyes and even her pale-brown skin, the costume seemed part of her. He could see nothing about her that was not exquisite—no detail from which to build up a remedial disgust. So he ground out at her:

"Your nature? What rot! As if that ever attracted me, with its false pretenses of heart, its instabilities and downright treacheries. What else do you offer? This that I see? What we human fools call beauty? What is beauty?"

She sat down in despair, observing that even his jaws, under his heavy mustache, looked more salient It was almost laughable, she thought; but she was far from laughing. Every moment she expected to hear the door-bell.

He continued ferociously:

"In the beginning these arms and legs of yours were nothing but appliances for hanging from trees and running away from wild beasts. Your body was merely a convenient case for a machine that kept your life ticking along. How does one get the idea that all this is good-looking? Ages ago men decided to think so for reasons that have nothing to do with esthetics; they passed the hoax on, and in time these physical features got themselves surrounded with a perfect fog of sentimental and romantic balderdash. Take your face.

Your nose is bridged in that so-called ravishing way in order to let a stream of air into your lungs. Your eyebrows—how many sonnets have been written on eyebrows—are there, in the first place, to keep the perspiration from running into your eyes. Your lips are merely a binding against the friction of food. How grotesque to find such expedients beautiful! No doubt in other planets there are creatures that you'd call monsters; and they'd call you hideous. In fact, there can't be any such thing as beauty."

"No doubt you're right, Cornie dear."

"And what's it all for?" he ejaculated, in a stupefied kind of horror. "All this sordid consolidation of flesh and blood, this disgusting hallucination of attractiveness? All for— All for ——"

"I know," she assented. "More Lillas, *ad infinitum*. Isn't it tiresome?"

He jumped up with a groan.

"I could kill you!"

"Too late. You ought to have done it when we were children together."

"Yes; too late, too late!"

He wandered round the room, slapping one fist into the other, glaring at the walls, from which old-time ladies simpered vapidly at him. His brain seemed to be whirling round in his skull; his vision became blurred, and he had a dreadful apprehension of losing contact with normality. But normality, too—what was it? Normality was being natural! He came toward her; she rose and recoiled; but he caught hold of her arms above the elbows, and held her fast when she swayed back from him with a long shimmer of her copper-colored gown.

"You're hurting me, Cornie. And there's the bell," she breathed, her heart going dead.

He released her with the gesture of a man who hurls an enemy over a precipice. He gasped out, "One of these days!"

And with a livid smile he left the room as David Verne appeared in the doorway, motionless in his wheel-chair, propelled by Hamoud. But David, too, was nearly unrecognizable.

"What is it?" she exclaimed, and turned to catch her reflection in a mirror. She saw herself in a curious aspect also, white and a little wild. One of her shoulder-straps had slipped down across her arm.

"What a dress!" she said.

David carefully pronounced the words, "That was Rysbroek, wasn't it?"

"Yes; I've known him since we were kiddies."

"I remember your saying so."

"He brought me bad news," she added, to imply, "That's it."

"Ah, I'm sorry." There was no life in his voice.

In the dining-room the servants moved noiselessly, as though fearful of disturbing the long silences. A sickly breeze stirred the curtains of apricot velvet.

He ate nothing. When Hamoud had wheeled him back to the drawing-room, he asked: "Do you mind if I go? A splitting headache. This weather."

"You shouldn't have stayed in town, you see," she returned automatically.

"Maybe I'll go up to Westchester for a week or so." His dull eyes rested upon the picture that she made as she stood before him uneasy, with an appearance of guilt, her figure like a shaft of flame springing upward from the hearth. "Besides," he concluded, "keeping you here all this while a prisoner——"

"How can you be so unkind?"

"At least I'm not ungrateful."

He made a sign to Hamoud, who stole forward to take his post behind the wheel-chair; and the two faces regarded her with the same brave, secret look, the same queer impassiveness that was like a deafening cry. Her nerves began to fail her. With an unaccountable feeling of perfidy she straightened his cravat, while murmuring, "I'll see you first, of course, dear?"

"Of course."

But he neither saw her nor telephoned before his departure; nor did he write to her from the house in Westchester County.

ON THE third day she went to Brantome, who said, "I was coming to see you."

Fixing her with his tragical old eyes, he informed her that he had received a long-distance call from David Verne's physician, who had telephoned from the house in Westchester County. In three days David appeared to have lost all that he had gained in these months. For some reason he was letting go of life.

"Why is that? Is it because he is letting go of you?" Brantome's leonine countenance took on a hostile expression. He persisted. "Eh? Is it you who have done this?"

And Lilla understood that to this old devotee of the arts she had ceased to be anything except a means to an end.

He seemed contemptible to her with his red-rimmed, fiery eyes, his viking mustaches that had turned truculent, his whole aspect of animosity at this last collapse of hope. And of a sudden she divined the true basis of those hopes of his—the longing for at least some vicarious creation, the desire to escape, in part, his own sense of defeat by aiding, and therefore sharing, the triumphs of another. He put himself in her path; he would not let her go. He was preparing to hurl at her who knew what insane reproaches.

"Oh, get out of my way!" she cried at last, in a breaking voice. She pushed him aside so viciously that he tottered back on his heels. She rushed out of the room, down-stairs, into her car. The limousine sped northward into the country.

She watched the placid fields, the wooded hilltops, the lanes that wound away between walls of sumac. She thought of another unexpected ride toward another crisis of life. Her heart was beating wildly; her breathing was labored; her hands twitched open and shut. She took the mirror from its rack, and saw her pupils extraordinarily dilated, so that her eyes appeared black.

The car left the highway, to enter a park of well-grown trees. She caught sight of the low, simple mass of the house, its walls of gray plaster rising between two clumps of evergreens, beyond a garden laid out in grassy stages, where flagstone paths wound away between beds of heliotrope. On the terrace, under an awning of striped canvas, stood a man in a dark-blue robe that was open down the front to reveal a white underrobe confined with a scarlet sash. He had a close-fitting skull-cap on his head, of white embroidered linen. He was Hamoud-bin-Said. She passed him without a second glance, and found herself face to face with the physician, who was just starting back to town.

Dr. Fallows began to talk to her judicially and suavely, with a tone of regret, but possibly with an undertone of contentment; for this case, after having bewildered him for a time, was now imitating all the proper symptoms again. The patient's recent improvement had been due, no doubt, to one of those rallies that may interrupt the progress of any incurable disease—an example of the persistence of the *vis medicatrix naturæ*—or, in better words, he explained, the healing impulse of nature. But now the relapse was complete.

She was aware of a lot of fluted wainscoting around her, and, beyond Dr. Fallows' head, a Tudor staircase in silhouette against a large bay window of many leaded panes. Some of these panes, of stained glass in heraldic patterns, gleamed against a passing cloud like rubies, emeralds and sapphires that had lost their fire. Dr. Fallows still blocked her way—almost another Brantome!—engrossed in his pessimistic peroration. Behind him the staircase was suddenly bathed in sunshine; all the panes of stained glass became sparkling and rich; and a sheaf of prismatic rays stretched down, through the gloom of the hall toward Lilla's upturned face.

She sped up the staircase.

All that she saw was the four-post bedstead canopied with cretonne, the face on the pillow. At her approach, a thrill passed through the air pervaded by the stagnation of his spirit. He opened his eyes.

"You! And I thought I had unchained you."

She knelt down beside him, and asked, "What have I done to deserve this?"

He managed to respond: "You deserve more, perhaps—a worldful of blessings. But this release is all that I have to give you."

"Do you think I care for that man? I even hate him now, if it's he who has brought you to this."

He looked like a soul that sees an angel hovering on the threshold of hell, promising salvation.

"Oh, if I could believe you!"

And all the propulsions that had brought this moment to pass now forced from her lips, "I am here to prove it in a way that you can never doubt."

That day, at twilight, she standing beside his bed, they were married.

BEYOND seas, deserts and snow-capped mountain-peaks, in the equatorial forests where the Mambava spearmen dwelt unconquered, the black king, Muene-Motapa, sat in the royal house listening to a story-teller.

The king sat on an ebony stool, in a haze of wood smoke, muffled in a cape of monkey-skin embroidered with steel beads; for while it was summer in America, it was winter in his land. Behind him, in a wide semicircle against the walls of thatch, sat his black councilors, war-captains and wives, their eyeballs and teeth agleam in the light cast up by the embers. On the other side of the fire, the story-teller discoursed from between two warriors, who leaned their heads pensively against the upright shafts of their stabbing-spears.

At the story-teller's gestures—since gestures were needed to explain these wonders—chains clanked on his wrists. The chains had been fastened upon his arms and legs long ago, when he had begun to struggle back to health, surviving wounds that even his hardy captors had expected to prove fatal. When he fell silent, the councilors, captains and women patted their mouths to express their astonishment, and the king declared:

"A good tale, *Bangana.* Do you know still another?"

So Lawrence Teck resumed his entertainment.

IN SEPTEMBER David began to write his tone-poem, "Marco Polo." The idea mapped out, there began for David Verne the period of complex mental tension, of intense concentration, during which an interruption might scatter forever a sequence of valuable thought. He had now, for many weeks, to see the whole work complete in the abstract, never at any moment forgetting the whole plan or any of its countless contrasts and balances. And always he had to perceive, at the same time, a dozen qualities of sound, assigning each to the proper instrument in the imaginary orchestra. Moreover, it was necessary to escape somehow the perils that lay in wait for the composer when he puts his thoughts to paper—that loss of spontaneity which was always threatened, since the most original of geniuses must still conform, somewhat, to ready-made laws.

Lilla, knowing how great this mental and emotional strain must be, wondered that he was strong enough to bear it.

He not only bore it but seemed to thrive on it. The desire to be to Lilla, despite his infirmity, something that no other man could be, made him prodigious in his work; and as the tone-poem expanded from this inspiration, he gained still greater impetus from the mere tonic of success. Toward the end of October his asthenia had diminished enough to allow him to play the piano, weakly, in three octaves.

Dr. Fallows, on one of his visits a witness of this achievement, went out thunderstruck to his car, muttering to himself:

"There even seems to be less abnormal pigmentation! Can it be possible that my diagnosis was wrong?"

He looked severely across the sunny garden, where the last of the summer flowers—giant daisies above beds of tufted pansies—were triumphantly flaunting themselves.

He returned to the house, and, for the purpose of experiment, ordered that the arsenic solution, which he had prescribed, should no longer be administered to the patient in increasing doses.

"LILLA! Lilla!"

She appeared in the doorway of the study like a muse that he had summoned by an infallible conjuration.

His day's work was over. He showed her what he had done. She leaned down beside the wheel-chair to scan the pages, her fluffy brown hair filled with the afternoon sunshine. And David, in the exhaustion following his labor, dreamily immersed his senses in the sight of her pale-brown cheek so close to his, in the strangeness of her perfume, in the singular cadences of her voice that was always inspiring new harmonies, and in the caress of her cool, fragile hands that had drawn him back from death.

"Is it good?"

What he meant was, "Is it good enough to keep you from regrets?"

She understood, pitied him the more, redoubled her tenderness. And this wan idyl of theirs, as nearly incorporeal as though she were indeed an ethereal visitor, took on a new pathos which was accentuated by the withering of the flowers in the garden, the first hints of the rigor of winter.

He marveled at her self-immolation in this lonely house. He wondered how long such a state of things could last. Then, summoning back his new courage, he continued his combat against the unknown rivals, who, perhaps, had not yet revealed themselves to her, or else had thus far sent to her only ambiguous and subtle heralds of their coming—a breeze flavored with the past and promising an imitation of old transports, a cry of departing birds like a reassurance of the inevitable return, not only of the spring but also of natural love.

"What are you reading now?" he would ask her apprehensively; for so many books were replete with accounts of a different sort of union.

Or, when she had gone to walk through the grounds at sunset, he, chained to his wheel-chair, watched her departing figure with a sensation of dread, asking himself what thoughts would come to her out there, under the immense compulsion of the scarlet clouds.

His fears, for lack of any other definite object, often veered toward her memories.

She returned to him at dusk, languid from that brief promenade, like those Eastern women whom Lawrence Teck had once described to her. He saw her eyes misty with shadows which disappeared as she came forward into the lamplight.

Yes; she has been thinking of him.

He suspected that she thought of "him" also in the night.

"Don't go yet," he would plead, when she came to his bed, into which Hamoud-bin-Said had tucked him like a child. So she sat down; and the ray of the night-lamp fell across her sensitive lips that had parted at the kisses of "the other." David's thin, romantic, bronzed face, with its queer commingling of adolescence and genius, was fortunately in the shadows cast by the curtains of the bed-canopy.

"Ah, how dull it must be for you! If we had some visitors? Brantome——"

"No," she said.

"And yet it was through him——"

"What! Haven't you seen through him yet?" she returned in a jealous tone. And presently, with an accent of fear, as if her intuition had discerned some serious unrevealed event of which Brantome was going to be the cause, "I wish we could have met some other place."

"You dislike him so much?"

She reflected, "How can I strike a blow at that revolting old man?" She responded: "It was he, you know, who told me of that other woman, the one before me, who had you when you were well."

She rose, laid a kiss upon his forehead, and went away to her rooms across the corridor, leaving with him her perfume.

FANNY BRASSFIELD, whose country-house was not far away, sometimes dropped in to see Lilla.

"Hello, David!" she said, sitting down beside the tea-table and crossing her knees. "How's old Marco Polo to-day?"

Her bony cheeks were rosy from the cold wind; her green eyes glittered with health; and her whole countenance, under a tilted putty-colored toque, expressed her full satisfaction with what she had found in life. Lilla thought with envy of all that this woman had never imagined or felt, all that she had been able to enjoy without self-questioning.

How simple life was for some people!

"I'm giving a little party. No doubt it's useless to ask you——"

Fanny Brassfield interrupted herself to stare at Hamoud-bin-Said, who had entered the room without a sound.

He had on a long, dark blue *joho*, or robe, embellished down its open front with a tracery of gold. Underneath he wore the *kanzu*, the underrobe of fine white cotton, embroidered round the neck with a bit of red needlework, and reaching to his boots of soft black leather. Round his waist was a blue-and-gold sash, from which protruded the silver hilt of his J-shaped Zanzibar dagger. His head was covered, as always in the house, with a white embroidered skull-cap. In one small hand he held a Venetian goblet, in the other a bottle of medicine.

It was the hour for Dr. Fallows' prescription.

"Really," Fanny Brassfield exclaimed, in her high-pitched, insolent voice, "I must get myself one of these— What is he again? Zanzibari?"

Hamoud, towering there in the attire of an Omân gentleman—which she took for a specially effective livery—contemplated the great Mrs. Brassfield. His full eyelids were dreamily lowered over his lustrous eyes. His long, straight nose seemed narrower than usual, perhaps from disdain. But his clear-cut carnelian mouth, vivid between his faint mustache and his delicate beard, did not change expression, although he was calling the great Mrs. Brassfield a female beneath the contempt of a Muscat slaver, the progeny of camels and alley-dogs, and other names besides. As if regretfully he turned away to David Verne, measured out the arsenic solution, and presented the goblet, a tapering treasure covered with gilt-and-crimson protuberances, an antique that had stood before grandees in the wave-lapped palaces of Venice, brimming with Greek wine, or maybe with Renaissance poison.

David Verne himself raised the goblet.

"Dr. Fallows has really done wonders, hasn't he?"

"Wonders," Lilla echoed with a smile.

In the hall, as she was leaving, Fanny Brassfield said to Lilla: "By the way, Anna Zanidov is in town. She was asking after you."

Without moving, Lilla murmured slowly, "Ah, she wants to tell my fortune again, perhaps?"

"She has stopped doing that. It got too uncanny. You know yourself that everything she ever predicted came to pass. Including three deaths; that is, two besides——"

"One must believe that she sees it," Lilla assented, and, frozen by her thoughts, shuddered violently. "Yes; too uncanny! She did well to give it up."

"Especially as people were getting to be afraid of her," said Fanny Brassfield while passing through the front doorway.

IN THE forests of the Mambava, in groves of banana trees, the peaked, thatched roofs of Muene-Motapa's stronghold rose in concentric circles round the royal houses.

Here, all day long, one heard the bleating of goats and fat-tailed sheep, the coo and whir of pigeons, the thump of wooden mortars in which the women, their nude bodies covered with intricate designs of scars, were grinding millet. At times these noises were pierced by the clatter of little hammers, with which the smiths were beating into spear-blades the lumps of iron smelted in rude furnaces from ferriferous quartz. It was an hereditary art. Who had taught it to them? Perhaps the hook-nosed adventurers from the Phœnician coast, who had bequeathed to them also a nebulous religious awe of fire, of the sun, and also of the moon, personified in legend by a pale, ardent, supernatural woman of surpassing beauty.

In their low verandas the warriors reclined at full length, their bangles of copper jingling as they reached out their hands toward the calabashes full of palm wine or the smoking-gourds charged with hemp. At the gate of the king's stockade the guards sat with their stabbing-spears across their knees, surrounded by wolflike dogs and naked children with distended abdomens.

It was in the royal enclosure that Lawrence Teck had endured his captivity.

Beside him, waking and sleeping, there remained two guards, so that in Muene-Motapa's capital there was a lucid riddle, "What is it that casts three shadows?" Those two prehistoric warriors were aware of an incomprehensible great value locked up in the captive's mind; yet at his first false movement they would have slaughtered him, destroying cheerfully, like many others before them, what they could never hope to understand. However, they were kind to him. King Muene-Motapa had said to them long ago,

"If he escapes, you shall be beaten to death with sticks; but if he tells me that you have not treated him respectfully, soldier-ants shall eat you alive."

For despite his chains Lawrence Teck was the chosen friend of the king.

Muene-Motapa had been fond of him even before the drunken riot in which he had got his wounds. This friendship had then become a proprietary emotion, compounded of affection, remorse, the fear of revenge, and even a sort of proselytizing zeal mixed up with self-interest. Muene-Motapa hoped that in time his prisoner would renounce all desire for the white world, embrace the beliefs and habits of the Mambava, become a subtle counselor in diplomacy as well as in wars of conquest. In short, those tales of the lands beyond these forests—the wiles of Islam, the methods by which the Europeans were eating up the earth—had revived in the king the incoherent and grandiose dreams of his youth. In this captive, whom he would some day make his brother, copriest and fellow general, he had found the knowledge to supplement his force and make himself invincible.

So, night after night he repeated the same plea, sitting in the royal pavilion, across the fire from the white man whose guards had been sent out-of-doors.

Muene-Motopa was tall, muscular, bold of gesture and fierce of face. His word was life and death. Day and night he was surrounded by chiefs, councilors, wizards and royal ladies who roared with laughter when he smiled, gnashed their teeth when he frowned, accompanied his every comment with moans of admiration and a soft snapping of their fingers. They were round him now, aligned against the wattled walls, behind the film of wood-smoke, breathlessly awaiting the sound of his deep voice.

He began, in a chanting tone, to rehearse the past glories of the blacks. He spoke of that great ancestor of his, that other Muene-Motapa whose kingdom had extended from the country of the Bushmen to the Indian Ocean and from Nyasaland to Delagoa Bay.

Then the white men had come.

"The flies destroyed the horses. The fevers burned up the men. Those who survived, my forefathers pierced with their spears. Have I shown you the trophies, *Bangana?* The hats of steel, the corselets of steel, the pistols that one fires by lighting a string? My forefathers gave those things to their children for toys, and grass grew through the bones of those white men. But there came more, and more, and more, swarming over all the land, till now my country alone is free from them. Shall that be? Have I eaten rabbits? Am I some village headman? When I stamp my foot seven thousand spearmen spring from the ground. I am Muene-Motapa!"

In the crimson glow from the ashes the chieftains, the councilors and the wizards raised their faces which were convulsed with rage. The wattled walls hurled back a deafening chorus of war-cries.

The king drank from a gourdful of cashew-brandy, wiped his lips, and shouted: "Consent, *Bangana!* Consent, *Mfondolo*, who might be my brother lion, pouncing upon army after army as the lion pounces upon the antelope. I have shown you the *zimbabwe*, the stone cities of the ancients. With slaves we will dig the gold out of the quartz reefs, buy guns from the Arabs, and drive these little yellow-skinned white men back into the sea. We two will rule over the land of my ancestors, the kingdom of the first Muene-Motapa. Through your mouth we will treat with the English, the Arabs, and all the world as equals. I shall not kill you, because you will be my mind. Besides, I love you."

At a wave of his hand, behind the veils of smoke the women of the royal household rose and departed, their symmetrically scarred torsos shining with oil, so that they resembled statues of polished bronze. They were slender, graceful, informed with the gentleness of those reared in the shadow of royalty, showing profiles that suggested the faces chiseled on Semitic monuments. Fringes of bark-cloth hung down from their yellow girdles to their knees; over their breasts dangled strings of pearls and amber beads from Bazaruto; each wore on the middle of her forehead a charm intended to make her fortunate in marriage. They left behind them an odor of cheap German perfumes, which Mohammedan traders had brought to the edge of these forests.

When they had passed beyond ear-shot—for the mention of sacred things was not to be thought of while women sat within hearing—the king continued:

"What more can I do to show you that I love you, *Bangana?* I have initiated you into the mysteries of my people. You know the ceremonies of the dead, of those who become of age. I have shown you where the fire is kept from which, once a year, all the fires in my kingdom are rekindled. I have told you which mountains and streams are holy. I have even admitted you into the secret of my own divinity. Nay; I have done still more. I have let you see my people dance for the Lady of the Moon."

There was a deathly silence.

Lawrence Teck remained as before, his bearded face bowed down; but a slight tremor of horror passed through his shoulders under the sun-blackened skin.

THE Dances of the Moon! Yes; he had seen them once; and all the frightfulness of Africa had then been made manifest to him at last, as if the very soul of Destruction had condensed itself out of the vapors and venoms and invisible menaces of these primeval forests, to assume, for one night, a horde of nearly human shapes. But he shuddered not at his memory of that spectacle but at its effect on him—an effect that he had denied with a passionate clanking gesture of his chained arms, yet that had remained in the depths of his brain like a serpent, which had always slept till then, and had ever since been gnawing at his thoughts.

He recalled the deafening thunder of the drums, the glare and the blood, the moon peering down through the branches like the face of a perverse divinity pale from pride, and the thought that had come to him there, in his lonely hopelessness—that while some in a fit of weakness and despair might turn to God, others might turn to the oblivion promised by Evil.

RAISING his head, he called out in a voice as strong as the king's: "Still dreaming, Muene-Motapa? Awake, and let me go!"

The king leaped to his feet, to pace the earthen floor. His kilt of leopards' paws swayed from side to side; his amulets jingled; his shaven head glistened amid the shadows like an ebony ball. His court bowed their naked bodies, muttering: "Father of elephants! He shall stamp on this man, and his foot shall shake the whole earth!"

Muene-Motapa bitterly asked his captive: "Is there not always rich meat, and beer and brandy in season? I have also hundreds of women who are young, as slender as palm trees, with teeth like milk. I will buy women from the Arabs, with red or tawny skin and straight hair like waterfalls. I will send men to steal the women of Mozambique—white women with hair brighter than firelight. Why do you not marry my little sisters, my brother? They pine away for you. Or is it wealth? I know the little book that you carry in that pouch! When you look into it, you remember all the quartz reefs in the gorges of the mountains beyond my forests, with their veins of gold and of gray and yellow copper; and the river sands full of gold; and the places where you have seen the iron that draws iron, and the tin and the black grease. But I have already told you that you shall be rich. What is the matter with you, *Bangana?* Are you deaf?"

He squatted down before Lawrence Teck and thrust forward his angry face; and his pendent pear-shaped earrings of jasper, which some Phœnician adventurer had worn perhaps four thousand years ago, quivered as he shouted with all his might:

"Are you deaf, I say? Shall I open your ears with a spear-point?"

He stared in stupefaction at Lawrence Teck's stony countenance, then suddenly burst into sobs.

"See how I love him!" he moaned. "And yet he hates me; and I shall never be great."

The prisoner thought to himself, "Now, if ever, is the time." He laid his hands on the shoulders of the king with a movement at once commanding and compassionate. All the courtiers stopped weeping to gasp in consternation at this sacrilege; one or two stood up, and here and there in the shadows a blade of steel returned the crimson gleam of the embers.

Lawrence Teck said gently, as if talking to a child: "Alas, my brother, I should lead you only to some death unbefitting a king. You were happy before you made me your captive; these chains have tormented you as much as me. Strike them off, and let me go. Forget me, and free yourself from vain thoughts."

"I should not forget you, *Bangana,*" the king responded in a small, thin tone, as though the virile resonance of his voice had passed away with all his naive and grandiose hopes. "All those tales! To whom shall I listen now at night? Besides, it has been good to see you here every day; for you alone in these forests have really understood my heart—and have stabbed it to death with your wisdom."

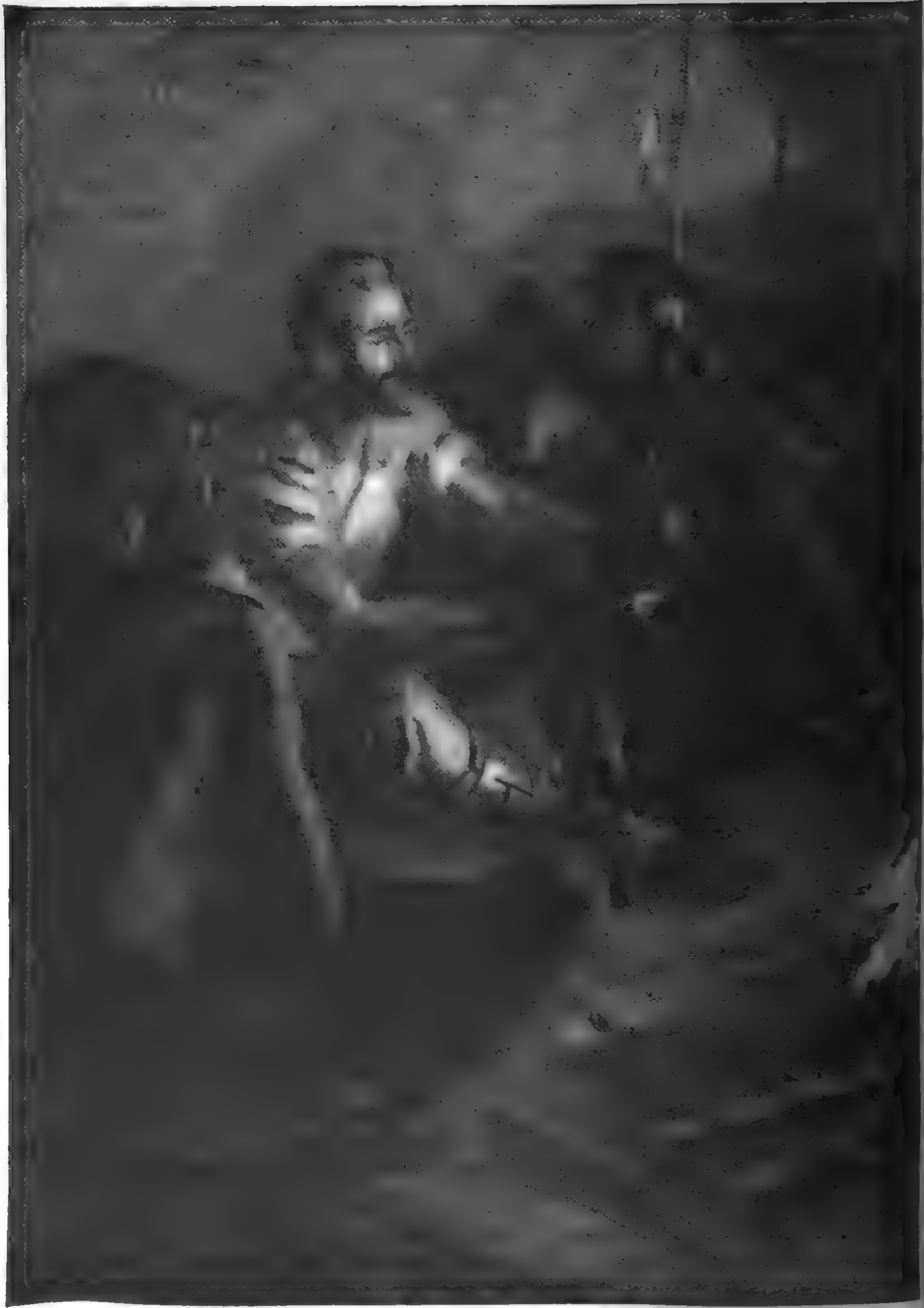
He pondered dismally, while the councilors and chieftains wept out his unexpressed grief, so that the whole pavilion was filled with their full-throated sobbing.

"Will you ever return, *Bangana?*"

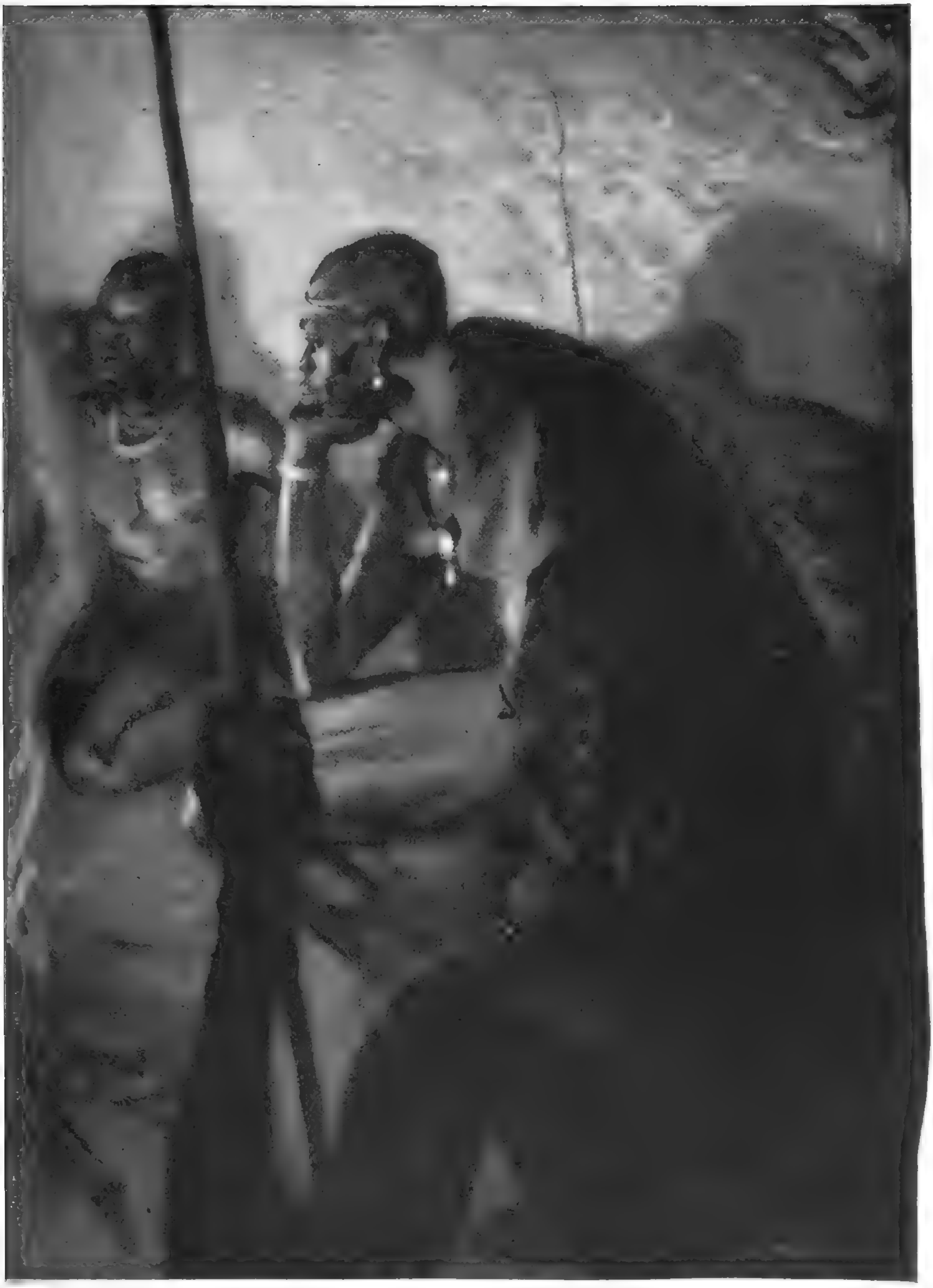
"Why not? To persuade you to peace instead of war. To make treaties for the passage of my workmen through your forests to the new mines, and to give your people work if they will accept it."

The king closed his eyes. "All that again! What is this civilization? Has it made the other tribes happy? No; my face will be glad when you return to see me; but never ask me to let those white men wedge their foot in the door of my country. There would only be a great battle without you to help me in it. I and my race, if we cannot be mighty, at least will die free men."

He rose from his heels, and in a strangling voice called out to the guards, who came headlong.



In the equatorial forests where the Mambava spearmen dwelt unconquered, the black king, Muene-Mota
to explain these wonders—



it in the royal house listening to a story-teller. At the story-teller's gestures—since gestures were needed
hains clanked on his wrists.

"Strike off the chains from my brother!" shouted Muene-Motapa, as who should say, "Slay my dreams!"

Then he stalked away, to sit alone in darkness.

Next day, with an escort of Mambava warriors, Lawrence Teck set out for the coast.

At the bidding of the king, to do honor to the white man who was leaving them, they had put on their gala-paint and their plumed head-gear bound under their chins with fur lappets. Their bangles made a cheerful clatter as they marched along the dim trails between the enormous trees. They carried food for two weeks.

Emerging from the forests, they saw the lowlands steaming in the heat; for while it was winter in America, here it was summer.

The plumes of the warriors bobbed along in single file; at sunset the spear-blades seemed still wet with blood. They raised their long shields, adorned with crude geometrical designs, and sang for the white man a rambling song of parting:

"But he will return some day to bask in the countenance of Muene-Motapa."

They all took up the refrain, "To bask in the countenance of Muene-Motapa."

Their voices rose strongly, full of exultation. On a branch above them a python, awakened by those vibrations, revealed itself in an iridescent gliding of its coils.

Suddenly, on the edge of a jungle of bamboo, they stood still. Far off appeared the bastions of a fort of whitewashed stone mottled and streaked with green. A flag was hanging limply from the flagpole.

His two shadows, in bidding him farewell, began to weep, their tears running over the white grease-paint with which their cheeks were bedaubed. They turned away with a choking cry:

"Farewell!"

"Farewell!" all the other warriors uttered in unison, fiercely, at the top of their voices. Their howl passed over his head, like a defiance, toward the distant fort.

So Lawrence Teck returned to civilization.

THE commandant of the district, a melancholy, flaccid man with a saffron-colored visage that looked like a half-deflated balloon, a martyr to prickly heat, anemia and monotony, peered up from under the moving punkah to inquire of his subordinate in the doorway,

"He is still sitting there alone?"

"In the same position," the subordinate assented.

"I wish now that I hadn't shown it to him," said the commandant of Fort Pero d'Anhaya, the district judge, the chief of the public works, the receiver of taxes, the collector of revenues, the postmaster, the poor exile prematurely aged by the African sun, the sorry "hero on the outposts of civilization."

The subordinate shrugged his shoulders and retorted, "They would have told him on the coast."

"No doubt," said the commandant, giving the other a veiled look of animosity, expressing thus a little of that loathing which had gradually come to embrace everything habitual to this pitiless and violently beautiful land. And when the subordinate had withdrawn, he muttered to himself, as he returned to his apathetic contemplation of the papers on his desk: "All the same, an ideal! And I killed it for him a few days before there was any real need."

The moist heat of the equatorial summer penetrated the embrasures of the fort and made stifling even the dim whitewashed room where Lawrence Teck was sitting. Dusky from the sun, and seeming more aquiline than ever in his gauntness, he remained like an effigy in the suit of white duck that hung round him in loose folds, without so much as a movement of his eyes. His hand rested on a tattered copy of an English journal.

The commandant had extracted this journal from a pile of newspapers and magazines of half a dozen countries, all thumbed and ragged from perusals that had embraced the most trivial advertisements, and all still precious because by their aid one's spirit could fly home. This London journal contained at the bottom of a page, amid some gossip about music in America, the announcement that "the widow of Lawrence Teck, the explorer," had married the young composer, David Verne.

Raising his eyes at last toward the casement in the embrasure, Lawrence saw, against a glaring turquoise sky, the fronds of a borassus-palm, which seemed like all the rest of nature to be sleeping. He leaped to his feet, realizing that he was in Africa, till far from the coast, and that at this monent, in another hemisphere——

The walls, the sleeping borassus-palm, he patch of sky, all became red.

He walked to and fro, saying to himself n what seemed a jocular tone: "Didn't vait long. A composer. Think of that!"

He stood still, his bearded face upturned oward the casement. He let out a peal of aughter that froze the blood of the whiteobed servants who had been dozing in the tone corridor. They crept beyond earhot of the stranger who, with his hips vrapped in bark-cloth, had suddenly appeared on the rim of the safe world against a background of shields painted with the levices of the terrible Mambava.

But Lawrence Teck quickly recovered an xternal impassiveness. He sat down, and onsidered:

"How naive I was. That's when the entimentalism gushes out, at the end of ong journeys, at the novelty of elegance nd sophistication. One deifies them then; ne gives them a place much larger than hey ought to take up in life. How Muene-Motapa would laugh! He, virtually a Neoithic man, never sinks below manly houghts; his ambitions are never enfeebled y the malady of sentimental love. So vhen he suffers it is like a man, not like a lescendant of medieval mystics and *cavaieri serventi.*"

His body relaxed, and he muttered: "A bit of romance for her in imitation of some avorite play or book. An emotional hour vith the man from Africa—and now a musial fellow."

AFTER a sharp, ironical expulsion of his breath, he resumed that immobility vhich extended even to his eyes. He realled the thoughts of her that had filled his aptivity, all his memories of their union vhich had gained, from "the pathos of disance" and from the passage of time, an mmaterial, an ideal nobility, till at last, n the poetic fancy of his lonely heart, she ad become more remote and diffuse than he moonlight on the mountain peaks, more ntoxicating and elusive than the odors of he equatorial flowers, an influence rather han a woman, a vague hope, a sort of sanaive faith.

It was, he reflected, all one with the ronanticism that had driven him to those many wanderings, the longing for what was so dissimilar to him and yet intensely congenial—the magical deserts where one suffered from heat and thirst, the gaudy jungles where death lay in wait for one, the woman who concealed, beneath an appearance of perfection, an incapacity for a decent period of grief. Ah, there was the perfidy more deadly to him than all the plagues and vipers and weapons of Africa!

He felt a profound revulsion from his own nature, which was flawed with this sentimentalism, this jejune expectancy. At nightfall, rising wearily from his chair, he wondered how he was to go on living with himself.

"And after all is it her fault? I was dead. No doubt she shed some tears. Because I loved her I expected too much of her. I suppose one always does."

Through the casement he saw a world fading away beneath clouds as black as ink. A purplish-gray wall of rain was swiftly approaching the fort. A pink fork of lightning stood out against the clouds; the crash of thunder was followed by a noise like a thousand waterfalls; and everything turned black.

"Ah, Lucifer is falling down-stairs again."

The rolling thunder recalled to him the thunder of the Mambava drums at the Dances of the Moon; and in the darkness he remembered the voice of Muene-Motapa pleading with him to cast off the old, to become a new man, to return amid the black forebears of mankind, kill hope and even conscience, forget and be at peace. In the turmoil of the storm around the fort and in his breast he even seemed to see the king in apparition before him, and to hear the words:

"Consent, *Bangana!* Consent!"

"Bah! As if anything in life were worth all this. All sound and fury. All pompous silliness like this storm. Presently there will not be an echo or a trace of it."

He found the door, burst out into the corridor, then walked sedately under the flickering lamps toward the commandant's rooms. That yellow-visaged man jumped up from behind his desk, stammering,

"Yes; it's dinner-time."

The candles on the dinner-table jarred at the peals of thunder; but Lawrence Teck sat impassive. Toward the end of the meal he vouchsafed, "Have you reported my showing-up?"

"I was going to put it on the wire to-morrow morning."

"If it could be arranged, I should like to precede the news to America."

The commandant, without knowing why, felt a touch of alarm.

"Then I'll send my report direct to the governor, and mark it confidential at your request."

That night the commandant, lying under his mosquito-net, wakeful from prickly heat, was haunted by the face of Lawrence Teck. "She must be very beautiful," he sighed. "Why didn't they print her picture?" And he occupied himself with trying to imagine what she looked like.

By the time he was falling asleep he had decided that she must have yellow hair and large blue eyes. Just as he dozed off he had a ravishing impression of her—a composite of an Austrian archduchess, whose likeness he had admired in a periodical, and a Neapolitan singer who had overwhelmed him in a music-hall at home, long ago, when the world had seemed a place stored with love, fame and wealth, instead of with prickly heat, malaria and shiny black faces.

"My angel!" breathed the poor commandant of Fort Pero d'Anhaya, sleeping for the first time in many a night with an infantile smile on his countenance that suggested a half-deflated balloon.

HAMOUD, wearing the blue robe edged with gold embroidery and carrying in his right hand the Venetian goblet, was halfway out of the living-room when David Verne resumed:

"No, you must really go about more, or you will begin to hate me for this captivity."

The young Arab paused beyond the living-room door, his handsome head inclined to one side, waiting for the response—not for the words, but for the mere tone of her voice. He heard,

"While you are holding your own and working so well, I am happy."

Hamoud closed his eyes, in order to let those silvery vibrations occupy his whole consciousness. Then, staring before him, he went swiftly across the wainscoted hall with his lithe, noiseless step.

David Verne, in his wheel-chair that stood beside a tall lamp, gave her a furtive, sick look, before continuing:

"Is it always happiness that I discover on your face? Is that what you show me when you raise your eyes blankly from some book, or return from the garden after those lonely walks of yours in the twilight? Or is it pity, not only for me but also for yourself?"

"David!" she protested, her nerves contracting at this threat of a scene that must lacerate both their hearts.

But he persisted: "I don't disbelieve what you told me about Rysbroek. It's not he that I'm jealous of. I can even believe that there's no other living man in your thoughts. Of course the man who is dead will always triumph over me by comparison. And some day, since mortals are bound to strive for a duplication of their happiest moments, another will appear to promise you that duplication."

How young he seemed in the light of the tall lamp, despite all his former physical sufferings and his present anxieties! Again there was a look of childish pain on his lips. and in his large eyes humid beneath the brow that harbored thoughts of a magnificent precocity. A maternal compassion filled her at sight of this weakness, this helplessness. She returned:

"How can you say such things? When I refuse to go anywhere, because you couldn't go with me without being bored——"

"You mean, without feeling my inferiority."

"Is it inferiority to be the great artist that you are? What wickedness! You, with your genius, aren't satisfied, but envy those commonplace men because their bodies move easily from place to place. Can their minds soar up like yours?"

"Perhaps not—nor sink into such depths."

She rose to approach the long window against which the night had plastered its blackness. He watched her inevitably graceful passage from the light into the shadows, and her nervous attitude as she stood with averted face, staring out through the lustrous glass. She was agitated by who knew what secret thoughts in accordance with that involuntary withdrawal—the movement of a prisoner toward the window of a cell.

"Let's not deny the facts of life" he began again. "Let's not pretend with each other. Pity doesn't make one incorporeal. All your angelic compassion can't transform you from a woman into an angel, especially when you see, at every glance in your mirror, the charms that a moment of generosity has made futile."

She came to him quickly, knelt down beside the wheel-chair, and put round him her bare, slender arms.

"Don't you know that I love you, David?"

"There are so many kinds of love," he sighed, gazing at her dark eyes that once had flamed with passion, at her fragile lips that had uttered such words as he was never to hear.

"I want nothing else," she affirmed, in a voice wherein no one could have found any insincerity.

"Perhaps you believe even that. But when it comes to you, then you'll realize what a trap I've caught you in." He gave her a look of horror. "Why did you go there that afternoon to Brantome's? When you saw me there, sitting alone in the shadows, dying with no weight on my conscience, why didn't you leave me alone? But maybe you had no idea of the effect you were going to produce on me—that your look and voice and mind were what I'd always been waiting for. Or, since you had to come there, why couldn't my conscience die at the moment you made me live again?"

He bit his lips to keep back a groan.

She declared: "You're harming yourself again. You won't be able to work to-morrow. You'll see!"

"What is my work worth, if it dooms you to this?" Presently he said, in a quiet tone, "It would be easy to free you."

"Ah, you are horrible!"

"Don't be afraid. If there is anywhere beyond this life, anything in the nature of a heaven, it would seem inferior to this house, where I can see you without possessing the love that you're capable of, and hear your voice utter these incredible reassurances. Yes; my conscience torments me, but not enough for that. While I may, I'll hold on to you and to life, even when I feel sure that your thoughts are turning elsewhere, and even if it comes to pass that your bodily self must follow those thoughts. For as your pity returns, so must you return to me. What a weapon I've found in pity! What a victory it will bring me! Some other man may end by winning your self; but I, as long as I can keep my grip on life, will cling to this ghost of you!"

"Do you do this just in order to drive me mad?" she cried out.

"No; you would understand if you could see into my soul. All its surgings and clashings, its vortices of pain and joy, the anguish that somehow produces an audible beauty, and the ecstasies that are struck mute by these fears! If I could explain all that, you would forgive me for these moments that are beyond my control. But I can't explain it. Not even in my music. One is always alone with one's heart. Even in love one must always be alone."

"But I do understand," she protested.

If she did, it was because she also was alone.

THAT night, as she was going to her own rooms, she saw Hamoud in the upper corridor. Something forlorn and lost in his exotic aspect struck through her sadness. She remembered how far from home this exile was, how far removed also from the rank to which he had been born. She hesitated, then asked remorsefully,

"Do you hate me, Hamoud?"

He turned pale, standing before her with the wall light shining upon his face of a young caliph.

"I, madam?"

"Well, for what I've got you into: this service, which must distress you every day. But what was there to do? It offered itself when I—you, too, I suppose—could think of nothing else."

Paler than ever, he replied in Arabic:

"You are sorry for me because I have lost my *heshma*, my prestige? It is part of the divine wisdom, the foreordained plan of my life. All things happen for the best. The house is warm; so that one does not feel the winter. There is food; so that one does not starve. Therefore my body is at peace—" He paused to compress his carnelian lips before concluding serenely, "And as for my soul, it rests as always in the palm of God, like a bird waiting to be taught its ways."

He left her burdened by the idea that behind his calm words there was an emotional tension similar to the physical tension of a man stretched on a rack.

How will Lilla meet the terrible predicament in which she will presently find herself? This stirring novel is continued in December EVERYBODY'S, out November 15th.

The Rider of Golden Bar*

Billy Finds the Missing Link in His Chain of Evidence and Hazel Admits that She was Wrong

By William Patterson White

Author of "Paradise Bend," "Hidden Trails," "Lynch Lawyers," etc.

Illustrations by Remington Schuyler

WHEN the political powers of Crocker County found that their new sheriff, Billy Wingo, was not going to behave himself and let them follow their crooked ways in the peaceful manner to which they had become accustomed, they decided to remove him at once and completely. Feeling that they could not do justice to the job, they called in one Dan Slike, a professional gunman. Slike, they said, knew how to do that sort of thing properly and with the least amount of fuss. At the same time they thought it would be convenient to settle a few of their private disputes, charging to Billy's account the resulting casualties. True to their expectations, there wasn't much fuss; but when the dust settled they found to their chagrin that Jack Murray had been forced to quit the neighborhood, leaving no address, and that Slike was in jail charged with the murder of Judge Driver and Tom Walton. Nor was their grief mitigated any when Billy took up a collection for Hazel Walton, Tom's niece. Arthur Rale, the district attorney, was horribly upset at the size of the contribution he was called upon to make and swore that he would get even.

Hazel was Billy's incentive to make good, and realizing that his elevation to office gave him the opportunity to marry, he fully intended to make the most of it. But Hazel was driven nearly frantic for fear of Billy's safety and begged him to resign. "I can not marry a man whose life is in constant danger," she told him.

Billy refused to play the coward and said that she would see that he was doing the right thing. When she remained obdurate, he was moved to wrath. "I have asked you to marry me for the last time," he declared. "If you ever change your mind, you will have to come to me and tell me that I was right and you were wrong."

Billy's enemies could not let matters rest as they were. At any time Slike might talk and say things detrimental to their characters. Consequently Felix Craft, thoughtfully dressed in some of the sheriff's extra clothes, held up the Hillsville stage, and Tip O'Gorman was found dead with the sheriff's hatband and quirt lying near by. Billy left town that day somewhat in advance of a hotly pursuing posse.

At the same time Slike departed from jail, and while the district attorney led a posse in the wrong direction the amiable gunman paid a call on Hazel, soundly thrashed her for not being appreciative of his visit and left with her horse, her hat, a butcher-knife and plenty of supplies. A few minutes after he had gone the dazed girl had another caller, Rafe Tuckleton, who, inspired by Hazel's beauty and too much whisky, announced that he was for taking her home. After a frantic struggle she succeeded in getting his six-shooter and driving him from the house. Later in the evening the district attorney and several of his friends found Rafe dead with a knife marked T W between his ribs. They promptly clapped Hazel in jail.

Arthur Rale went to sleep that night conscious of a day's work well done. His peaceful slumbers were of short duration. Billy had heard of Hazel's predicament from Guerilla Melody, and when he left the

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district attorney's house that pale and trembling person went at once to the jail and promptly released her. The next day, Rale issued another warrant for the arrest of the sheriff, and sent a posse to the mountains north of Golden Bar, where Billy had said that he was going to hunt for Slike.

Billy, however, went far to the south, where, with Johnny Dawson, he had trailed Jack Murray and Slike. They caught Slike just after he had shot two men for attempting to interfere while he was branding a calf, but Murray disappeared. Billy's first act after capturing the gunman and taking his guns and a butcher-knife away from him was to thrash him within an inch of his life for his dastardly attack on Hazel. Then, feeling much relieved, he sat down to think over certain matters. In the first place, there were the two dead men, both from the Golden Bar, where they had worked for Simon Reelfoot. The fact that they had left so soon after the death of Tip O'Gorman was significant. Then there was the knife marked T W which Slike carried in his boot-leg; that meant Slike had not killed Rafe Tuckleton. Why were there two knives exactly alike when Hazel had had only one? A gleam struck him and broadened into the bright light of complete understanding. He hugged his knees and smiled. "I got him where the hair is short. It's one complete cinch," he chuckled.

Several days later the sheriff *pro tem.* of Crocker County found a roped and gagged Slike at the door of his office. Later in the day Guerilla Melody called on the storekeeper and looked through his hardware catalog. Still later Johnny Dawson rode out of the Golden Bar bound for the nearest telegraph-line.

That same day Guerilla and Dawson met Simon Reelfoot as he was riding range. While they engaged him in conversation, Billy approached from the rear and removed Simon's gun. "Keep your paws up," he said. "Johnny, let's have that envelope with the confession in it." Simon's face assumed a richly jaundiced hue. "We found Conley," Billy continued, looking over the sheets of paper, which, had Simon known it, were innocent of any writing. "Conley talked before he died. We've got you dead to rights. You damned murderer, what did you kill Tip for?"

Simon's shaking legs refused to uphold him. He fell on his knees. "He was gonna get me mixed into that Walton murder. I was drunk. I didn't know what I was doing! Oh, my Gawd!"

Billy flung the groveling Simon from him. "This ought to be enough for you."

"I gotta give you credit, Bill," Guerilla said admiringly. "I didn't think the bluff'd work."

That evening there was another prisoner in the Golden Bar calaboose. "Listen to that skunkified Reelfoot," grinned Riley Tyler. "His nerve has completely gone bust."

"It's funny how he keeps insisting that Bill Wingo was with Guerilla and that Dawson man when they captured him. Why, everybody knows Bill is far, far away." Thus Shotgun Shillman, his tongue in his cheek.

IN THE mean time Billy Wingo was calmly eating his supper in the house of Guerilla Melody. On Guerilla's bed Dawson was snoring the sleep of exhaustion.

"What next?" asked Guerilla Melody when Billy was lighting his after-supper cigaret. "With Tip's murder settled and knowin' who killed Tuckleton——"

"Certainly doesn't help us any with the stage hold-up," cut in Billy. "Before we spring the joke in the Tuckleton deal I've got to do a li'l more work on the hold-up. Dumping Rafe's murderer won't do me a heap of good while I'm breaking rock for twenty years at Hillsville. Don't look so glum, Guerilla. There's a trail out. There always is."

At the tail of the words a convivial voice in the street broke into boisterous song.

"Who's that?" asked Billy.

"It's Jerry Fern," said Guerilla indifferently. "He's drunk again."

"Ain't that kind of new for him? He never used to drink much."

"Oh, he can't stand prosperity."

"Prosperity?"

"Yep. Aunt died, left him some money. He ain't drove for nearly a month."

"The lucky devil! Big legacy?"

"I dunno how much. Fair size, I guess. Must have been for Crafty to lend him money to play with."

"What?"

"Don't get so excited," cautioned Guerilla, with a nervous glance over his shoulder.

"You've no idea how your voice carries. Even if you don't mind being dumped, I do. And I don't care three whoops about spending two or three years in jail for giving aid and comfort to——"

"Shut up, for Gawd's sake!" begged Billy. "Do you *know* Crafty's been lending money to Jerry?"

"Didn't I see him with my own eyes more than once? But——"

"Say, don't you see anything else yet?"

"I see you, but that ain't sayin' much."

"Guerilla, if you weren't so serious you'd be funny. But don't get downhearted. I'm as foolish as you are, every bit. Why, when they had me corralled in Sam Larder's house, and Crafty blatted right out loud that he didn't know Jerry Fern was driving that trip and Tip and Sam said later that they knew Jerry was, I had the answer to the puzzle right then if I'd had the sense to follow it up. But I never caught the connection till you said Crafty was lending money to Jerry. Lending him money! Do you think you can get Jerry Fern in here and make him drunk?"

"When?"

"To-night. Now. I want to get Jerry so full he'll talk. Tell us all he knows, see?"

At last Guerilla Melody got a glimmering. "I'll make him drunk," he said earnestly. "And I'll make him talk, or there ain't a drop of virtue in Old Crow."

Guerilla flipped on his hat and departed.

HALF an hour later Guerilla returned, bringing his sheaves with him. And, oh, the sheaves were merry and, oh, the sheaves were drunk. Guerilla himself was giving an admirable imitation of a roistering blade.

"Meet my friend, Mister Johnny Dawson," said Guerilla, waving an expansive hand toward the erstwhile strayman.

"Huh, h'are you, Misher Juh-johnny Duh-duh-dawson," said Jerry Fern, solemnly shoving out a wavering paw and missing the mark by eighteen inches. "Whasher name of other tut-tut-twin?"

For a bad moment Dawson feared that Billy Wingo had been foolish enough to come in from the other room. Then he understood. "His name's Eliphalet," he made reply, solemnly turning to the empty air on his right.

Jerry Fern again pumphandled the empty air. "Pup-pup-pleased meetcha," he stuttered. "Cuc-cuc-cuc-can't pup-pronounce name, but thash all ri'. All li'l friends tut-together. Wheresh bottle? You gug-got bub-bub-bottle, Guh-guh-gil-Guerilla?"

"Sit down," urged Guerilla, steering Jerry to anchor. "Here's your bottle."

Jerry Fern clasped the bottle to his bosom and sang a lusty stave.

"Rye whisky, rye whisky,
Rye whisky, I cry.
If I don't get rye whisky
I surely will die."

Like the boy in the story, Jerry could sing without stuttering. But when he began again to talk his enunciation was worse than ever. "Buh-buh-buh-whistle for the crossing—but I ain't gug-gug-gargle gonna die. Nun-nun-not me. I gug-got rye whuh-whisky."

He put the bottle to his lips and drank without ceasing till the bottle was empty. He held the bottle against the light. He pressed it to his ear. He shook it. Then he tossed it nonchalantly over his shoulder, laid his cheek on the table and began to snore.

This would never do. Guerilla and Dawson shook him awake.

"Mush been shleep," mumbled Jerry, knuckling his eyes. "Gimme anuzzer dud-drink."

"Not yet," said Guerilla firmly. "Is Felix Craft a good friend of yours, Jerry?"

"Helluva good fuf-fuf-friend," was the instant reply.

"He doesn't pay you enough," prompted the carefully drilled Dawson.

"Thash whu-what I tut-told him!" cried Jerry Fern, pounding the table with a vehement fist. "I ought tut-tut-to have mum-more."

"He's treatin' you mean," said Guerilla. "He ain't goin' to give you any more money."

"Yesh he wuh-will," insisted Jerry.

"He told me different." Thus Dawson.

"Yesh he wuh-will. Huh-he'll have to gimme all money I want. Pup-put him in juh-juh-jail if he don't."

Guerilla and Dawson looked toward the doorway giving into the other room. Then they began to laugh immoderately. "That's a good one!" cried Guerilla, wiping his eyes. "You can't put Felix Craft in jail. He hasn't done anything wrong."

"Oh, ain't he?" flared Jerry Fern with all the drunkard's irritation at being disbelieved. "I know more abub-bub-bout Fuf-felix Cuc-craft than you thuh-think. I cuc-can muh-make Fuf-felix Cuc-craft lul-lie dud-down and rur-roll over."

"Yes, you can!" With derision.

"Yeah, I cuc-can!"

"What makes you think so?"

"I know all rur-right," vaguely.

This was maddening. Billy, in the other room, yearned to take Jerry Fern by the scruff of his drunken neck and squeeze the truth out of him.

"You don't know a thing about Felix Craft," persisted Guerilla. "Not a thing."

"Damn shame he don't pay you enough," chipped in Dawson.

"Maybe if I went to him I could get more money for you," suggested Guerilla. He waited a moment for the meaning of this to sink in before adding, "What will I tell him?"

"Tut-tell him I'll tell if he dud-don't pup-pay."

This sounded promising. "Tell what?"

"Tut-tell whuh-who held up the sush-sush-stage."

"Oh, that's nothing," said Guerilla. "Felix told me all about that. He said you didn't help him out a-tall."

Jerry Fern was instantly up in arms. "I dud-did so," he chattered. "He knows bub-better. Did-didn't he plan it all out wuh-with mum-me nun-nun-not to cuc-cuc-cut down on him, and didn't I tut-tell the pup-passengers to muh-make sure of Bub-bill's clothes and the bub-brass gug-gug-guard of his six-shu-shooter? Did-didn't I? Did-didn't I? Yeah, and his huh-horse and all, too? Dud-didn't I do all them thuh-things acc-acc-accordin' to cuc-contract? Did-didn't I? 'Cuc-course I did. And if Fuf-felix do-don't pay up I'll pup-put him in jail."

"That's right," Guerilla soothed him. "Do anything you want with him." He went to the door of the other room and whispered, "Has he said enough, Bill?"

"About," answered Billy, pushing his chair back and standing up.

"But maybe he won't repeat it under oath when he's sober," worried Guerilla.

"We won't wait that long. We'll sick him on Felix right now. You go find out where Felix is, will you, Guerilla, and—Here, wait a shake! Better have Shotgun Shillman and Riley Tyler in on this. Huh? Course not! Don't tell 'em I'm here."

"YOU can't tell me that infernal Bill Wingo ain't at the bottom of all this business!" snarled Felix Craft. "Guerilla Melody and that Dawson friend of his didn't get Slike by themselves any more than I did. I tell you flat, Bill Wingo was the boss of that job. He was the brains and you can't tell me different."

"And there was a time when we thought Bill didn't have any brains," Sam Larder grieved bitterly.

"I didn't," avowed the district attorney. "I always knew——"

"Oh, you!" interrupted Felix with a sneer. "You know it all, you do. You know so much, maybe you'll explain why Reelfoot says you told him Tip O'Gorman was gonna tangle him up in the Walton murder and that the easiest way was for him to down Tip."

"He says Rafe Tuckleton told him that," corrected the district attorney.

"He says you did, too," accused Sam Larder. "What did you tell him a thing like that for?"

"Reelfoot's a liar," declared the district attorney. "I never told him anything of the kind. Why should I?"

"I don't know. I'd like to find out." The fat man's stare was bright with suspicion.

The district attorney bristled. "Good Lord, man, I was always friendly with Tip!"

"You were friendlier with Rafe Tuckleton," pointed out Felix, "and we all know Tip didn't have any use for Rafe after that Walton deal, and Rafe knew it."

"It's just possible," put in Sam Larder, "that Rafe put Reelfoot up to downing Tip."

"In which case," supplemented Felix, "you bein' so friendly with Rafe, it would be natural for you to help him."

"Next thing you'll be saying I killed Tip." Thus the district attorney with sarcasm.

"No; because that wouldn't be true. I know you didn't kill him. But I'm not sure you aren't an accessory before and after the fact."

The district attorney went pale. But he made no attempt to go after his gun. Not

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against Felix Craft. Not now at any rate.

"I'll settle this with you later," he began. "I——"

"You'll never settle anything with anybody." Felix flung the insult with contempt.

"Let it go for now," broke in Sam Larder. "We've got to think of our skins. And if we don't catch Bill Wingo they'll be gone skins."

"You bet they will," said the district attorney. "That man at large is a menace. He'd bushwhack any or all of us three without a moment's hesitation. He's—he's capable of anything."

"I know he's capable of anything," Sam Larder said with deep feeling, thinking of Billy's escape from the Larder ranch-house. "And I'd give a good deal to know he was two feet underground. But Gawd knows we can't do more than we have done to catch him. Felix and me have ridden ourselves bow-legged combin' the Medicines for him."

"You bet we have," agreed Felix. "There ain't a square foot of those mountains we don't know intimate. Speaking personal, I've ridden—" He paused and looked across at Sam Larder. "That bet was I'd ride more than six hundred miles in sixty days. Remember, Sam? And the sixty days ain't up yet, and I've ridden more than six hundred already."

"What bet's that?" asked the district attorney chattily, anxious to reestablish friendly relations. "Who you betting with?"

"Nobody you're interested in," parried Felix Craft, it having been thought better to keep the district attorney in the dark regarding the happenings at the Larder ranch-house on the day of the stage hold-up.

"I'll go the limit we've covered a thousand miles," groaned Sam. "I've lost thirty pounds myself. I don't believe Bill ever went near the Medicines."

"Oh, he went there all right," said the district attorney. "Take my word——"

A POUNDING on the office door cut the sentence in half.

"You are certainly jumpy this evening, Rale," Felix Craft said dryly. "Open the door. Maybe it's our friend Bill."

The district attorney obeyed with caution. Not that he expected Billy. But then he did not quite know what to expect. That it would be something to trouble him he was positive. He was not disappointed. It was a trio of the Tuckleton outfit, to wit: the foreman, Jonesy, and two punchers, Ben Shanklin and Tim Mullin. All three were in the worst of tempers.

"Look here, Rale," Jonesy began without preliminary; "you've fooled with us long enough, and we're sick of it."

"We want action," rapped out Ben.

"You can't come any of this high-and mighty-stuff over me," said the district attorney, with an eye that flickered in spite of himself. "I don't know what you're talking about, but if you want anything, you'll have to ask for it in the right way and maybe you'll get it and maybe you won't."

"Is that so?" fleered Jonesy. "We'll see about that. What have you done in Rafe's case?"

"We hope to land the murderer very soon. We have several clues. We——"

Jonesy banged his fist down on the table with a force that made the windows dance.

"Shut up! You and your 'we's'! Rafe's murderer is that niece of Walton's, and you know it. You had her in the jug and you turned her loose. The evidence was sufficient to hold her on, you said. You said at that time you had evidence against Bill Wingo and expected to catch him soon. You haven't caught him, and we want to know what the evidence against him is. What is it? C'mon! Spit it out!"

"Now look here," temporized the district attorney; "I can't tell you——"

"You bet you can't" interrupted the angry Shanklin.

"Lemme do the talkin', Ben," directed Jonesy. "Look here, Rale; either you tell us what evidence you got against Bill Wingo or you issue a warrant for Hazel Walton's arrest. One or the other."

"Say, are you friends of Bill Wingo?" demanded the district attorney.

"You know better than that," snapped back Jonesy. "It's just that we're gonna know what's what."

"But what good will it do to rearrest Hazel Walton?"

"Then you haven't any evidence against Bill Wingo?" persisted Jonesy.

"I didn't say that. I——"

"If you can't tell us what the evidence is, we'll take it you haven't any. I knew there was some trick in it when you turned

Hazel loose. You and your evidence against Bill Wingo! You issue a warrant for that girl's arrest immediate!"

"I can't," denied the district attorney. "I haven't the power to issue warrants."

"Under the law," horned in Felix Craft, suddenly choosing his side, "when a felony has been committed, and there is reasonable cause for believing that the person to be arrested has committed it, that person may be arrested without a warrant."

"I thought you didn't want anything to happen to Hazel Walton," fleered the district attorney.

"I don't want her hurt, that's all. I haven't any objection to her being tried for the murder of Tuckleton. But I ain't going to have you haze her around. Understand?"

"There y'are!" said Jonesy. "You don't need a warrant for the girl. All you have to do is to give orders to Shotgun and Riley. They'll do the rest."

"But after turning her loose thisaway—" began the district attorney.

"You can rearrest her and have her tried on that butcher-knife evidence," insisted the stubborn Jonesy. "Just going by what she says herself, there's enough to fix her clock twice over. You dump her, Rale, and dump her quick!"

"Or we'll fix *your* clock," inserted Tim.

THE hapless district attorney cast his distressed gaze this way and that. But every eye that met his either was unfriendly or wrathfully hostile. Certainly there was no help for him in that room. The district attorney shuddered. He knew Jonesy and the rest of the Tuckleton outfit; knew, too, if he did not do as these men of violence demanded, that they would make him hard to find. On the other hand, if he obeyed them, Bill Wingo would as surely kill him.

The district attorney squared his afflicted shoulders and did the obvious—chose the more remote of the two evils. "I'll send Shotgun and Tyler to Prescott's to-morrow," he said, rose to his feet—and the door flew open and Jerry Fern, wild-eyed with liquor, stumbled into the room. The stage-driver rolled straight to Felix Craft and pawed him. "Fuf-felix," he babbled, "I wan' shush-shome mum-money."

The furious Felix shook him off. But Jerry Fern was nothing if not persistent. He returned with bellowings.

The grinning faces of Guerilla Melody, Johnny Dawson, Shotgun and Riley looked in through the open doorway.

"Come along, Jerry," called Guerilla. "We been hunting you all over."

Jerry Fern was not in the least interested in coming along. He had another and very definite end in view. "Fuf-felix, gug-gimme shome mum-money!"

Felix bit off a curse. "Look here, Jerry," he said soothingly, patting the hysterical drunkard on the back; "you go home and sleep it off. You don't want to go whopping round this way at your age.'

The district attorney stared. This was another Felix. The Felix they knew would have knocked the sot down.

"I wuh-wuh-wan' shush-shome mum-money," gargled Jerry, even as Billy's four friends pushed in through the open doorway.

"You come along with me," urged Felix, gently propelling Jerry toward the street.

Jerry braced his feet mulewise. "I wuh-won't! I wuh-won't! I wuh-wan' mum-money you promised me."

"I didn't promise you a nickel," said Felix, wrestling with his emotions. "But come along and I'll give you some money if you're hard up."

"Huh-how much?"

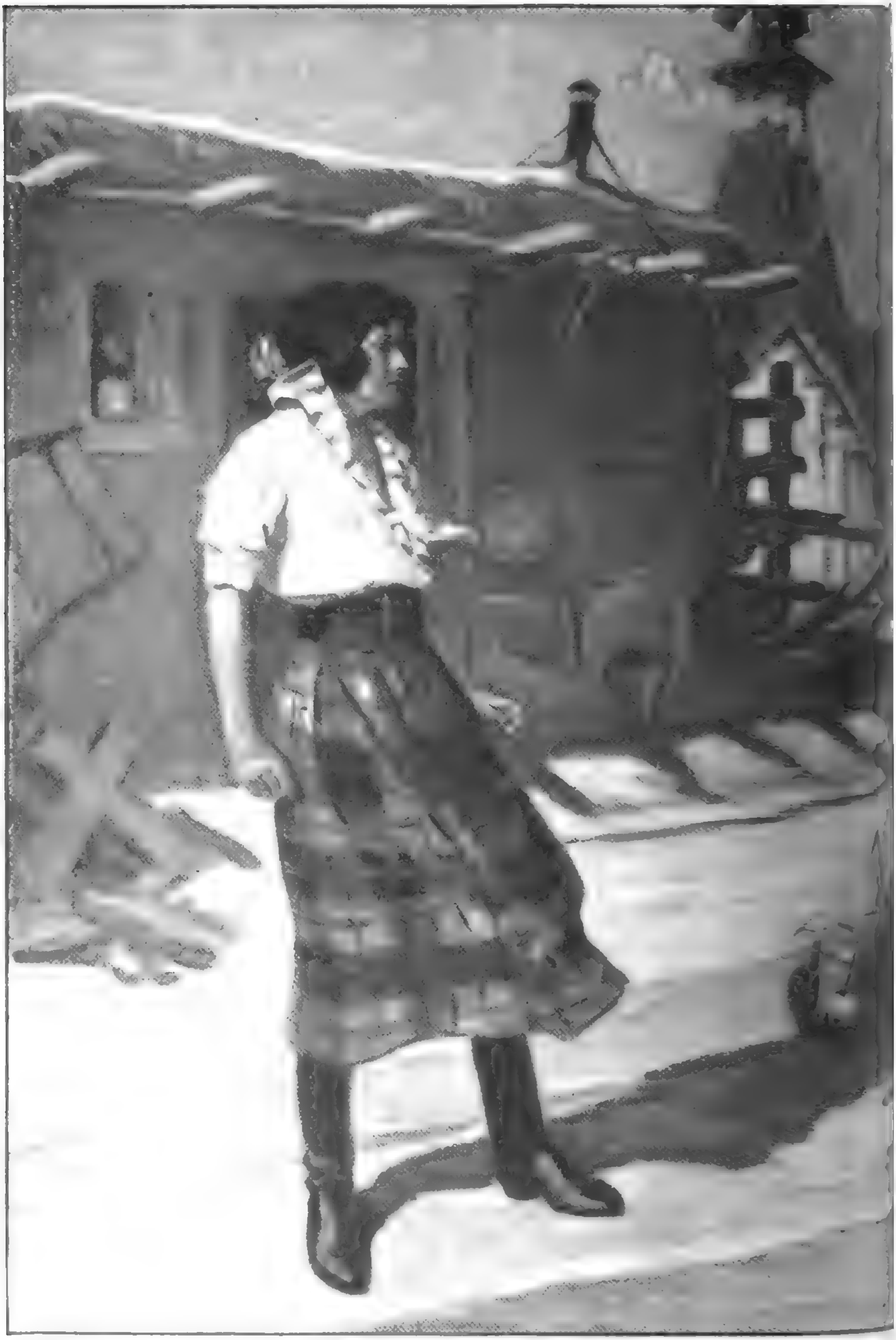
"Plenty. I'll give you what you deserve." There was cream and butter in the gambler's voice, but there was grisly menace in his restless eyes.

"Gug-give mum-me more than you gug-gave bub-before?"

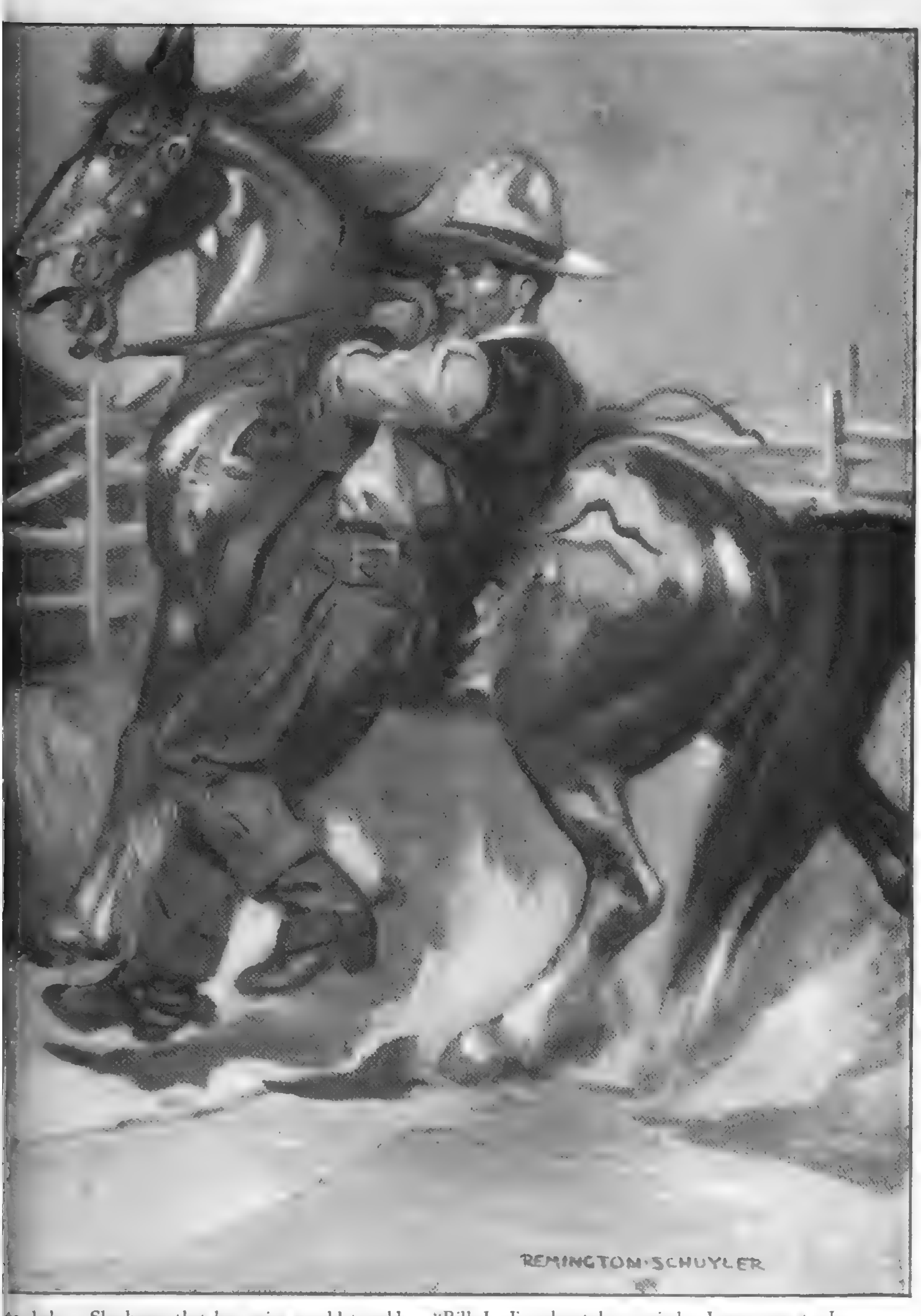
"Yes, yes. C'mon!"

"Wuh-wan' mum-money now!" yelped the contumacious Jerry, "or I'll pup-put you in jail!"

At which Felix lost his patience and his head, and gave Jerry the bum's rush through the doorway. Jerry skidded across the sidewalk and slid a yard on his nose. This annoyed him considerably. He sat up, supporting himself on a wavering elbow and squalled: "Yuh-you nun-needn't thuh-think I'm gug-gonna lul-lie for you nun-no longer! If you dud-don't gug-gimme plenty mum-money I'm gug-gonna tell folks how yuh-you huh-held up the sush-stage yourself all dressed up in Bill Wingo's clothes sho you cuc-could throw the bub-blame on him!"



Six feet from the horse Hazel stopped and stood very straight, her arms stiff at her sides. Her knees
you—you did the right thing to see it through. If—if you hadn't, I don't know what



to shake. She knew that her voice would tremble. "Bill, I —I've changed my mind. I was wrong. I—
have become of me." Then, of a sudden, he was off his horse and his arms were around her

Most certainly, then, the gambler would have put a bullet through Jerry Fern had not Shotgun Shillman and Riley Tyler been too quick for him.

"Now, now, Felix, calm down," suggested Shotgun.

"He's a liar!" foamed Felix, struggling to jerk his gun-arm free. "I never held up the stage! Bill Wingo did it himself! Ask Sam Larder!"

"Was Sam there, too?" said Riley with fresh interest. "Here, Sam, wait a minute. What's your hurry?"

"Got to see a man," mumbled Sam. "Be right back."

"Stay a while," invited Riley Tyler.

Sam Larder regarded the muzzle of Riley's gun. "All right," said Sam Larder.

"Felix," said Shotgun Shillman, "I don't *want* to plug you."

Felix Craft took the hint.

Johnny Dawson went out into the street and returned with Jerry Fern, who had forgotten his grievance against Felix Craft and wished only to sleep.

Shotgun Shillman looked at the district attorney. "Rale, this sort of puts a crimp in the notion that Bill Wingo held up the stage."

"It looks like it," admitted the district attorney, fumbling the papers on his desk. "Of course, we'll have to do some more investigating first."

THE district attorney, having looked carefully to the fastenings of his windows, tucked a six-shooter under his pillow and began to unlace his shoes. Came a rapping at his chamber door and the voice of his housekeeper.

"Say, Art, here's another of your infernal friends at the kitchen door. Says his name's Johnson."

The district attorney, jumping at a conclusion, immediately reached for his six-shooter. "I don't know any Johnsons. Not around here, anyway. What's he look like?"

"Middlin' tall, scrubby lot of black whiskers, talks sort of thick-like."

"Pebbles under his tongue most likely. Tell him to come into the kitchen, so I can get a look without him knowing."

"He won't come in. Says he wants you to come to the door your own self. Says it's important."

At which the district attorney was more than ever certain that the midnight visitor was Billy Wingo. "You go tell him that he'll have to come into the kitchen before I'll talk to him. Close the kitchen door most to. I can look at him through the crack."

The housekeeper departed, and the district attorney slipped off his shoes and tiptoed into the hall. The housekeeper, hair in curl-papers and wearing a wrapper, met him before he reached the kitchen door.

"He says he won't come in," she told him, "and told me to tell you he wanted to see about a note for five thousand dollars he has in his pocket."

"Now I know who it is," said the district attorney. "You go to bed. I'll let him in."

After the district attorney heard the slam and following click of his housekeeper's door he went into the kitchen, turned down the flame of the lamp and opened the kitchen door.

"That you, Rale?" inquired a muffled voice.

"Yes! Come in! Come in!"

The man in outer darkness spat out two pebbles. "Is that damn woman there?" he asked in the natural tone of voice of Jack Murray.

"No! Come *in!* I want to shut the door."

Jack Murray entered quickly.

"What in hell are you doing here?" demanded the district attorney when he and the other were behind the closed door of the office. "Don't you know——"

"I wanted to see you," said Jack Murray, seating himself in the nearest chair. "Ain't you glad to see me?"

"Not very," the district attorney said frankly. "If you get caught——"

"I ain't gonna get caught. The man ain't born yet to catch me. I suppose you got the money for that note."

"No, I haven't."

"Why haven't you?"

"I couldn't raise it."

"What's the matter with you? Ain't you got any credit left?"

"Folks won't lend money unless they get security, and I haven't any security that hasn't already been put up."

"*He* didn't ask for security"—thus Jack Murray with an indescribable leer.

"That—was—different."

"I guess it was. Yeah. I always had an idea you were a rich man."

"A lot of people thought so," the district attorney said bitterly. "As a matter of fact, I've been hard pressed for money all my life. I've always had a hand in too many deals."

"You were able to chip in on that reward for me without any trouble."

"I knew I'd never have to pay it. Some day when all my different enterprises pan out I'll have money, but now I haven't got any."

"How about that bribe in the Jacksboro range case last fall? Why, they must have paid you all of three or four thousand dollars."

The district attorney shook his head. "No; only twenty-five hundred, and two thousand of that went for some insurance I had to pay in January."

"Two thousand dollars for insurance!"

"That's what I said."

"You're lying. Whoever heard of two thousand dollars for insurance?"

"Oh, I wasn't the only one. Rafe had to pay the same. And Tip a thousand. Oh, never mind trying to understand it. It's too long a story now."

"I guess it is. I ain't carin' much about listening to any such stories anyway. I didn't ride alla way north from Dorothy just for that. I want the money for that note."

"I haven't it, and you could have gotten that information by writing for it. You didn't have to take the trip. You——"

"The money ain't all I come for. I want to settle my li'l account with Bill Wingo."

"I thought that li'l account was closed," said the district attorney, with the shadow of a sneer that Murray did not catch.

"It won't be closed till Bill Wingo is pushin' up the grass," averred Jack Murray. "This territory ain't big enough for the two of us."

"If you had any sense it would be."

"Meanin'?"

"Meaning that Bill Wingo is a pretty cold proposition for you to handle."

"I'm better than he ever thought of being, and don't you let anybody tell you different. I'll get that —— —— if I have to follow him to hell! Damn his soul! If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be where I am now! If it wasn't for him, I'd be sheriff of this county! If it wasn't for him— Oh, I got a-plenty reasons for putting that Wingo where he belongs."

"SALLY JANE, huh?" the district attorney supplied with malice.

"I din't say anything about Sally Jane."

"I know you didn't. But I got eyes, man. I'll bet you like her still."

"Don't you lose any sleep over who I like."

"I ain't. I only thought you might be interested in knowin' that she and Bill are thick again like they used to be. Thicker, you might say."

Jack Murray's thin lips became thinner. "Skinny Shindle told me somethin' about him switchin' to Hazel Walton."

"Don't you believe it," blattered the district attorney, continuing to rapidly pump the bellows on the fire of Jack Murray's hatred. "Hazel Walton was only a passing fancy. Sally Jane is the girl for him; you can gamble on it. Tough luck, Jack. I'll bet you'd have stood better than a fighting chance with her if she hadn't listened to his lies."

"He'll never have her!" snarled Jack Murray, wagging a vicious head. "By Gawd, he won't!"

"I guess she thinks he will—when this muss is cleared up," said the district attorney, with admirably simulated carelessness. "Hazel—I mean Sally Jane——"

"Yeah, Hazel! I'd say Hazel, I would. I should think her name *would* stick in your craw! What did that li'l girl ever do to you? Not that I give a damn—just between friends."

"She cost me some money, if you want to know," snarled the district attorney, who saw red every time he thought of the two thousand dollars he had been taxed by Billy Wingo for Hazel's benefit. "And anybody that costs me money will pay for what they get. Look here," he added with an abrupt change of subject, "how did you find out Bill was still in this county?"

Jack Murray gripped the district attorney's wrist. "Do you know where he is?"

Rale shook off the restraining hand. "I don't know exactly where he is," he said coldly, "but I'm reasonably sure he's round here somewhere. Good Gawd, man, don't you suppose if I knew where he was I'd have him dumped so quick his hair would curl?"

Jack Murray nodded. "He's round here all right, unless he's gone north beyond the West Fork. I cut his trail at Dorothy."

"Was he there?"

"Considerable. Yeah, him and another feller were there. Between 'em they caught Slike."

"Were you with Slike?"

"Not at the time he was caught, I wasn't. But a while before that I met him in Shadyside and I told him what Skinny Shindle wrote about the Horseshoe outfit needin' gunfighters. Slike, he didn't want to leave the country yet anyway, and we decided to throw in with the Horseshoe a spell."

"But how did Bill——"

"Trailed us, I suppose. First thing I knew here we found Skinny dead as Julius Cæsar alongside Fenley's Creek, and Slike he'd disappeared complete. There'd been a brush, and Shindle and a T U puncher had cashed."

"And where were you during the—brush?"

"I was on the other side of the range with a couple of the Horseshoe bunch payin' a visit to a nester. If I'd been with Slike and Skinny the deal would have turned out different, and you can stick a pin in that."

"Yes, you'd have been downed or dumped too."

"Meanin' you wished I had been."

"I didn't say so," the district attorney hastened to assure him.

"You don't always have to say so," said Jack Murray with heavy suspicion. "I'm readin' you like a page of big print, you lizard!"

THE district attorney forced a laugh. "You're too clever for me, Jack. Look here, what makes you think it was Bill Wingo caught Slike?"

"Because no posses from here went south so far, and because if anybody else but Bill had caught him he'd either have been killed outright or brought into Dorothy or Marquis and there'd have been a big time. Instead of that, there wasn't a peep. So it must have been Bill, see?"

"I see. And you're going to get this Bill?"

"You've got the idea."

"And you trailed him here?"

"I didn't have to. I knew he'd bring Slike to Golden Bar, so I came along the shortest way. It'll be quite a joke on you, this Slike business. Will he snitch, do you think?"

"He'd better not."

"You frown at him thataway and you'll scare him to death, Art. He's one timid fawn, that Slike person."

"He'll be——"

"Never mind what he'll be, Art. That's his business, and yours. I didn't come here to help Slike. I came here to get Bill and help yours truly. I want some money."

"I told you I haven't any."

"But you can get it."

"I told you folks want security."

"That will do to tell somebody else besides me. I've got my growth and cut most all my teeth a long time since. You'll have to raise some money—say about fifteen hundred."

"You might as well make it fifteen thousand."

"Maybe I will. Thousand sounds kind of good. Say about three of 'em. Three thousand dollars, Art, and I'll let you alone a while."

"But I tell you——"

"And I tell you that if you don't, that same identical note with a written account of what I know goes to Judge Donelson."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Think I wouldn't? You don't know me, feller. When it comes to money I'm the most daring cuss you ever saw. That's me, Jack Murray. Three thousand dollars, Artie, or you'll wish you'd never been born."

"I can't raise it," the district attorney insisted despairingly.

"I kind of thought you'd stick to that poverty squeal," smiled Jack Murray, fishing a folded paper from a shirt pocket. "So I took care before I came here to write down what I know about this li'l deal. I thought you might like to see how interestin' it all looks on paper. Hang your eyes over it, feller. Never mind snatchin' at it! I'll hold it for you to read. See, there's my name signed to it all complete. How do you like it, huh? Gives you a thrill, don't it? I'll bet it will give Judge Donelson two thrills. And as an evidence of good faith, to show you I still got it safe, here's your note for that five thousand. It will go with the letter to the judge—unless you listen to reason and raise the three thousand— What's that?"

"That" was a rapping on the kitchen door.

"Go in the bedroom," whispered the district attorney with a very pale face. "You can slide out one of the windows if I have to let him in."

"I'll go in the bedroom," Jack Murray whispered back with a chilling smile, "but I ain't slidin' out of any windows—not until you and I have come to an agreement about that money. I'll stick right there in the bedroom, Mister Man, right there—where I can keep an eye on you. Now go see what's wanted."

"You don't think I've stacked the cards on you, do you?" grunted the district attorney.

"I don't," replied Jack Murray. "Not while I've got that note and the Donelson letter in my pocket, you bet I don't. I ain't worryin' a mite, not me. Run along now, there's a good boy. Papa will be right in the next room."

Thus adjured, the district attorney ran along. Yet not without heart-thumping misgivings. For his was a fearful soul that night. A great deal had happened to upset him.

ON HIS demand that the late caller declare himself a voice whispered: "It's me, Guerilla Melody. Let me in quick."

"What do you want to see me about?"

"I got a bargain to make with you—a bargain about Bill Wingo."

"Did Bill Wingo send you?"

"You can take it that he did."

After all, why not? What danger was there in listening to the details of Guerilla's bargain? Perhaps he would learn something. Quite so. The district attorney unlocked the kitchen door and opened it.

A tall man pushed in at once. The tall man had a sardonic gleam in his gray eyes, a ragged brown beard, and a derringer. The twin-barreled firearm was pointing directly at the stomach of the district attorney. The district attorney's gun-arm hung up and down. The tall, brown-bearded man shot out a quick left hand and deftly twitched away the district attorney's weapon.

"You won't need that," he remarked in a hoarse whisper, tucking the six-shooter into his waistband. "Have you any other weapon on your person? Hold still while I look. No; I guess you haven't. We will now go into your office, Arthur. I have a li'l something for your private ear. I guess I'll lock the kitchen door, so we won't run any risk of being disturbed."

So saying, he reached behind him, slammed the door shut, shook it and turned the key in the lock. The key he dropped into a trousers pocket.

"What are you waiting for?" he demanded, still in that hoarse whisper.

The district attorney found his tongue—and stood his ground.

"Where's Guerilla?"

"I don't know. He left when you decided to let him in. You see, I thought you'd be more likely to open up if it was some one you knew, so I got Guerilla to do the honors. Just a li'l trick, Arthur, just a li'l trick. You're such a shy bird. No hard feelings, I hope. No? Yes? Well?"

"Whonell are you?"

"Me? Oh, I'm the Fool-Killer. Let us walk into your office says the fly to the spider, you being the spider, of course. And if the fly has to say it again, the spider will have something to think about besides the pitfalls of this wicked world. Thank you. I thought you would. And bear in mind that any wild snatches toward table drawers and so forth will be treated as hostile acts."

The district attorney continued to lead the way into the office. He started to sit down in his accustomed chair behind the table.

"Not there—there," said the brown-bearded man, indicating a chair on the other side of the table. "I'd rather sit on the drawer side myself. Not that I expect you to gamble with me, Arthur. But in my business we can't afford to take chances. Are you ready. Gentlemen, be seated."

He uttered the last three words in his natural voice. The district attorney failed to suppress a bleak smile.

"There's my old Arthur," approved Billy Wingo. "I knew he'd be glad to see me, give him time."

"Yes, indeed," declared the district attorney in a loud voice. "I'm always glad to see Bill Wingo. Bill Wingo, you bet."

Billy Wingo's gray eyes narrowed. "Not

quite so loud," he reproved the district attorney. "No need to disturb the neighbors."

"Why, no; of course not." The grimy soul of the district attorney capered with joy. What luck! Here was his enemy, and there was his enemy's enemy in the very next room. It would make a cat laugh. It would indeed.

"Arthur," said Billy, "I've been hearing bad reports of you. I understand you've decided to have Miss Walton arrested. Is that correct?"

"Correct? Sure. Sorry, but the law's the law, you know."

"You remember what I said I'd do to you."

The district attorney dismissed this with a simple wave of the hand. "Oh, that! A mere bluff."

"It may not be quite as mere as you seem to think. Let me argue with you, Arthur. Suppose I can prove that Dan Slike was at Miss Walton's the night Rafe Tuckleton was murdered. Would that help any?"

"You can't prove it."

"Oh, yes, I can. When he was there he stole her hat besides some other stuff, and inside the sweat-band of the hat he stuffed the folded upper half of the front page of the Omaha *Bee*. The other half of the newspaper was found at the Walton ranch-house by Shotgun Shillman. He has it now, and when Slike was caught he was wearing Miss Walton's hat, and inside the sweat-band was this particular folded upper half-page I'm telling you about. This evidence is in the possession of Guerilla Melody right now. When this comes out at the trial, why wouldn't that show that Slike was in the vicinity when Tuckleton was killed? And being in the vicinity, why——"

"Impossible!" snapped the district attorney. "I don't see how it could be hung on him."

"Won't you even have his presence there investigated?" Why, Bill was actually pleading. The district attorney swelled his chest like a turkey-cock. He would show Bill that he couldn't be bluffed. Not he.

"No; I won't have his presence at the Walton ranch investigated. In the first place——"

"In the first place," said Billy, "I know he didn't kill Tuckleton."

"Then why are you trying to prove he did?"

"Just to see what you'd say. Just to see how dead set against investigating Slike you are. Just to double-cinch the proof against the real criminal. You know that Dan Slike didn't kill Tuckleton, but that isn't why you don't dare read his trail too much. One reason is that if you do he'll be sure to blat right out how you and Felix and Sam Larder helped him to escape from the calaboose. Don't blush, Arthur. I know how modest you are. So we'll take it I'm right."

"Oh, you're welcome to what you think," said the district attorney. "But just for the sake of argument, how do you know that Slike didn't kill Tuckleton?"

"Because the initialed butcher-knife Slike took with him from Miss Walton's was still on him when he was caught."

"There must have been two knives!"

"There were two knives, but only one belonged to Miss Walton. Rale, when you and Felix and Larder caught Red Herring in the draw a few minutes before you found the dead body of Tuckleton, why didn't you ask more questions about Red being there so handy?"

"Because Red couldn't have had anything to do with it."

"I know he couldn't, but you weren't supposed to know he couldn't. You were supposed to ask questions about any suspicious circumstances, and did you? Not a question did you ask in town as to Red's movements that evening. You simply took his word for it, which wasn't natural—except under a certain condition. A certain condition, you understand, and it never occurred to me until I found that second knife. It would have saved a lot of trouble if I had thought of it sooner. Rale, you didn't ask any questions either about Red being in the draw or Slike being at the Walton ranch-house, and you gave out that Miss Walton herself had killed Tuckleton because you had planned ahead that she was the one you were going to hang the murder on. And why did you have it planned ahead? And how did you know it all so certain sure? How, damn you; how? Because you killed Tuckleton yourself!"

THE district attorney sat perfectly still. His eyes stole toward the bedroom door. What on earth was the matter with Jack Murray? Why didn't he shoot?

"I don't know why you killed him," went on the inexorable voice, "but you did. I've found out that early last spring you went to Nate Samson and borrowed his hardware catalog, Nate being the only storekeeper here handling hardware. Yes, Nate. I knew you must have gone to Nate, because you weren't out of town all winter; that's how. Nate said that you were the only customer to borrow the catalog. He said, too, that you told him when you returned it that you hadn't found what you wanted. I sent a telegram to the supply house getting out this catalog, and their answer stated that you had ordered from them, back in February, a butcher-knife, paying for it in stamps. They gave the catalog-number of this butcher-knife, and the catalog-number is the same number as that of the butcher-knife with which Tuckleton was killed. You cut T W on the handle of this knife, rusted it a little and ground it some, and then you—well, after you did for Rafe there in the draw near her house, you rode back to Golden Bar, gassed a while with Felix and Sam, and then you were in such a sweat to get the thing settled you couldn't even wait till next day. You had to ride out to *question* Miss Walton that same night. Another unnecessary circumstance. Rale, you rat, I've got you right where you can't even wriggle."

Billy leaned across the table to emphasize what he was saying, heard a slight sound in the bedroom and promptly blew out the lamp. With a heave of one arm he slammed the table over on the district attorney. The latter, taking the table to his bosom, went over backward together with the chair he sat in and wallowed on the floor.

BANG! A six-shooter crashed in the bedroom. A streak of yellow flame cut the darkness. A bullet snicked into the floor a yard from where Billy crouched. He emptied his derringer at the flash and changed position hurriedly. As he pulled his six-shooter there was another shot from the bedroom, a shot that wrung an apprehensive yelp from the district attorney.

"Don't shoot so far to the right! Y'almost hit me! He's over to the left more. About where the red chair stands."

This would never do. Never. First thing Billy knew, he would be shot. He stretched forth a hand, and breathed an inward curse. There was certainly a chair not a foot from his face. Taking care not to make a sound he lifted the chair by one leg and lobbed it through the air in the general direction of the district attorney. The results were immediate. The chair arrived; the district attorney squawked, and the man in the bedroom fired again, not according to the orders of the district attorney, but toward the spot where the chair had fallen. Billy pulled trigger at the flash of the other's gun. Then he began to crawl toward the bedroom door. He was a thorough believer in the doctrine of "getting in where it's warm." He succeeded beyond his expectations. The occupant of the bedroom, who had removed his boots, tittupped round the door-jamb and stepped on Billy's hand.

Both guns exploded simultaneously. What happened next has never been clear in Billy's mind. He only knows that his head rang like a struck bell at the shot, and burning powder grains stung his ear and neck. He fired blind. A voice above his head cried aloud on the name of God; a hot and sweaty body collapsed upon him, and he dragged himself out from under precisely in time to glimpse the district attorney who, having torn open the door into the hall, was silhouetted for an instant against the dim radiance emanating from the kitchen.

Billy hunched his right shoulder, took a snap-shot, and drove an accurate bullet through the right leg of the district attorney.

"He's comin' around," said Shotgun Shillman. "You shot too high, Bill. Y'ought to held lower, and you'd drilled his heart or anyway a lung. Now he'll be a invalid nuisance for a while like Rale."

"If I'd known you'd be so upset about it, I'd obliged you, Shotgun," returned Billy sarcastically. "As a matter of fact, I wanted both of 'em alive. You can't try dead men."

"That's so," assented Shotgun. "But what a waste of time when— Oh, all right, all right, Bill. Have it your own way. You're the dog with the brass collar, even if you do have to sleep in the jail till the warrants against you are annulled."

"What's Jack trying to do?" Riley Tyler asked. "Here, take that out of your mouth!"

It was Billy who reached Jack Murray first. He snatched the wadded ball of paper from Jack before he could close his teeth over it. Jack groaned.

"I didn't mean to hurt you," apologized Billy. "But I had to grab your jaw. You were so quick."

"You didn't hurt me," snarled Jack Murray. "It was somethin' else."

"What is the thing?" queried Guerilla Melody.

Billy smoothed out the crumpled wad. It appeared to be a letter and a promissory note.

"I forbid you to read that!" cried the district attorney, attempting to drag himself across the floor toward Billy. "That letter is personal and my private property!"

"You lie quiet," directed Riley Tyler. "If you go busting those bandages open, I'll bust you. Lie back; lie down, and take it easy. There's nothing for you to get excited over. Everything's all right. Yeah. That's the boy. Do as Uncle says."

"What's the writing, Bill?" inquired Shotgun. "Read her off."

Billy read:

JUDGE HIRAM DONELSON,
Hillsville.

Dear Sir: The man who killed Rafe Tuckleton is the county prosecutor Arthur Rale. Rale owed Tuckleton five thousand dollars on a note, and couldn't pay it. Rafe wanted his money. Early in the evening on the day he was killed Tuckleton came to Rale's house where I was at the time, and demanded payment. He brought the note with him. Rale refused and they quarreled. Tuckleton had been drinking. Before Tuckleton left he said he was going to the Walton ranch. After he left, Rale told me he had planned some time ago to kill Tuckleton and get the note back at the first opportunity. This looked like a good opportunity. Rale showed me a butcher-knife. He said it was just like one at the Walton ranch. He had cut Tom Walton's initials on the handle so it would be like it. Rale said he had tried to get the original knife, but had not been able to. This one he had fixed up had to do. He said when this knife was found on Rafe's body, everybody would think Hazel Walton had killed him, and nobody would believe her if she said the knife wasn't hers. He had it in for Hazel anyway, he said, and by rubbing out Rafe and laying the blame on her, he'd win two bets at one throw. Suppose they found the regular Walton knife, I said. Rale said it wouldn't make any difference. Anybody might know she could easy have two knives. Well, he offered me two hundred dollars cash to kill Rafe with this knife. I wouldn't do it, so he had a couple of drinks and said he'd kill Rafe himself. He asked me to go with him. I went, and we hung around Walton's till Tuckleton came out, and then we followed him, and Rale stopped him down the draw and said, "I've got the money for you, Rafe." And Tuckleton got off his horse and then Rale stepped up close to him and let him have it. He stuck the knife in him a couple of times after Tuckleton was down and wriggling round. When Tuckleton was dead Rale took the note out of Tuckleton's pocketbook, and I held Rale up and took the note away from him. I thought maybe I might want to show him up some day or sell it to him or something, when he got hold of some money. I was going to make him pay for it one way or another.

Here is the note he took off Tuckleton.

The district attorney will tell you who I am if I don't, so I haven't any objections to signing my name. I'll be in Old Mexico by the time you read this anyway. So long, and give Rale what he deserves.

Yours truly,
(Signed) JACK MURRAY.

Billy handed the letter and the Rale note to Shotgun Shillman, who folded both carefully and slipped them into an inner pocket of his vest. "And did you hear Rale say these were his private property?"

Shotgun Shillman nodded happily.

"Even without 'em there is enough evidence to hang him. But there's nothing like swinging a wide loop if you want to rope two at a clatter."

Billy's eyes followed Shotgun's side glance at Jack Murray. "You needn't look at me thataway," snarled Jack. "I'm no snitch! I only wrote that letter to throw a scare into Rale. I'd never have sent it to the judge a-tall!"

"Maybe you're no snitch," Billy flung back with deep disfavor, "even if it does look like it, but you were skunk enough to let an innocent girl be blamed for murder."

"That was different. She hadn't ought to horned in on what was none of her business. If she hadn't— Oh, hell, what's the use? Gimme a chew, somebody."

"WELL," observed Sam Prescott, "folks will be sending Bill to Congress next. Directly or indirectly he sure has put a crimp in county politics."

"Yes," assented his daughter; "now that the grand jury have indicted Craft, Larder, Murray and Rale, there isn't anything left of the Crocker County ring but the hole."

"Maybe now Hazel will make it up with him."

"Maybe"—with some indifference.

"Shucks, and he used to like *you*, Sally Jane."

"But I never liked him—enough"—this with more indifference.

"More fool you. Bill's going to get there, and you can stick a pin in that."

She bounced up from her chair and ruffled her father's grizzled hair. "I'd rather stick a pin in you, Samuel. Where did Hazel go?"

"Room, I guess. I don't know what's got into the child. She didn't eat enough breakfast for a fly."

"She has been acting pretty meaching the last few days. I'll go see what's the matter."

Sally Jane found Hazel folding up her clothes as fast as she could fold. The bureau drawers were empty. Everything was on the bed.

"What on earth—" began Sally Jane.

"I'm going home," said Hazel, keeping her face turned away.

The direct Sally Jane cupped a hand under Hazel's chin. "Let me see something. I *thought* so. What's the matter?"

"Nothing," declared Hazel, beginning to sniff a little.

"Then why don't you tell him so?"

"Him? *Him?*"

"Yes; him. Bill. Mr. William H. Wingo. The sheriff of Crocker County. That's what *I'd* do if *I* loved him."

"I don't love him," snapped Hazel, the shine in her black eyes giving the lie to her words.

"You blessed child!" said Sally Jane, and threw her arms around Hazel and drew her to her breast. "You blessed child! I don't know what ever came between you and Bill, but something did, and if you've got an atom of sense in your head, you'll move heaven and earth to make it up with him."

"He doesn't love me any more," declared Hazel, her emotion getting the better of her.

"Do you love him?" probed the older girl.

A pronounced sniffle.

"Do you?"

"I always have," came the dragging confession.

"Then for heaven's sake, tell him so! I'll bet he loves you fast enough! Land alive, if you've got love in your grasp, don't turn it down! Love is the greatest thing in the world, and if you throw it away, you'll never have any luck the rest of your life. And you won't deserve any either."

Hazel drew out a damp ball of a handkerchief and blew her nose vigorously. "It's no use," she told her friend with a catch in her voice. "I couldn't tell him. I just couldn't."

Sally Jane flung up her hands. "You're a coward, that's what you are. A moral coward. If I loved a man, which I don't, I'd tell him so, that is, providing he didn't tell me first," she added thoughtfully.

Hazel stooped to pick up a fallen chemise. "You're—you're different, Sally Jane. Besides, he doesn't love me any more. So it wouldn't do any good."

"Oh, no; of course not," Sally Jane waxed sarcastic. "And they say all mules are quadrupeds! Look here, Hazel, if it hadn't been for him you'd be in a fine fix right now. Why, that Rale man— Oh, you make me so mad I could shake you! I've told you more'n once how much you owe Bill. Look how he fought for you. Look— Oh, Lord! Haven't you got any gratitude at all?"

"Plenty," Hazel replied over her shoulder. "But my gratitude can't make him love me."

Sally Jane put her hand on her friend's shoulders and turned her round. "I tell you you're making a mistake. I tell you he does love you. You remember that last winter he came here several times, and he certainly didn't come to see me or dad. And you weren't overly cordial, you know, Hazel. You didn't fall on his neck exactly."

"I'm not going to throw myself at any man's head!"

"Oh, don't be so high-strung! You're too proud for any human use. And Bill's just like you, the stiff-necked lollop!"

"He is not!" Hazel cried, with a decided flash of temper. "He's not stiff-necked! He's not a lollop! Oh, Sally dear, don't spoil everything," she begged. "You've been so good to me."

Sally Jane immediately changed her tune. "But why leave here? Why go home?"

"Because I've imposed on you long enough. I'll be safe there—now."

Sally Jane looked long into the eyes of Hazel Walton. "All right," she said shortly. "I'll drive you over myself."

BILLY WINGO stretched out his long legs and absent-mindedly hacked the edge of his desk with a pocket-knife. "I told her she'd have to come to me and put her arms around my neck and tell me I was right and she was wrong, and *now* I've got to stick to it, damitall! Bill, you idiot, you always did let your tongue run away with you. Always. And now she won't make it up. Three days now since I got my job back, and not a word. Not a word. Well, one thing is certain sure: I ain't going to run after her. I ain't; not by a jugful."

"His lips are moving but he ain't sayin' anything," announced Riley Tyler in a loud, cheerful tone. "Do you think he's going crazy, Shotgun, or is it only the beginnings of droolin' old age?"

"I dunno," said Shotgun. "Better watch him. If he begins to gibber and pull out his hair he's looney, and we'll have to tie him down, I expect. Is your rope strong, Riley?"

"You fellers," Billy remarked with dignity, "make me more tired than a week's work."

So saying, he arose and went to the corner where his saddle and bridle lay. Three minutes later he rode out of Golden Bar.

"He's taken the Hillsville trail," said Riley Tyler, his nose flattened against the window-pane. "Where do you suppose he's going?"

"Going to spend some of the reward money, I expect. Joke on you, Riley, having to dig up a thousand plunks you haven't got."

"I'd rather owe it to him than cheat him out of it," grinned Riley, who had long since spent the money obtained from Jack Murray. "Alla same, I'll pay him when I get it. You lend me a hundred, Shotgun."

"Go 'way from me!" snarled Shotgun, flapping both hands at him. "If you're looking for easy money, sit into a game of draw, or rob a bank or somethin'. You won't get a single wheel from me. Nawsir!"

BILLY, riding the Hillsville road, came at last to the mouth of the draw that led to Walton's. He stopped his horse and looked along the draw. Then he looked along the road.

"Of course, I was going to Hillsville," he lied rapidly to himself, "but I don't suppose it would hurt to sort of ride past her house. Seems to me I heard somethin' about her leaving Prescott's. It may not be true, and then again— Let's go, feller."

Feller headed obediently into the draw.

Hazel Walton, sewing in the front room, saw a rider coming up the draw. "That looks like Bill's horse," she muttered. "And Bill's hat. It—it *is* Bill!"

Her heart began to pound. Her throat constricted. There was something the matter with her knees. She dropped the sewing in her lap and clasped her hands together. She breathed in little gasps.

Billy Wingo came on. He came quite close—within twenty yards, and stopped his horse and rested his hands on the saddle-horn, and looked at the house. Just looked.

Although she knew he could not see her through the scrim curtains, she drew her chair a little away and to one side.

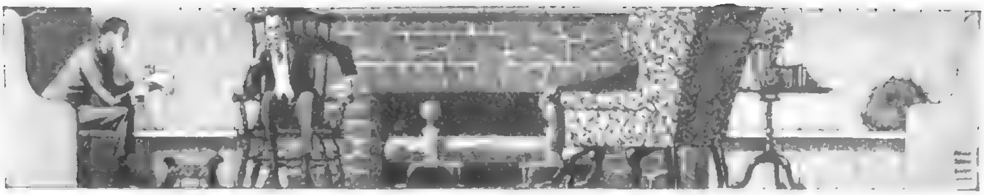
He pushed back his hat with the old familiar gesture. His face was expressionless. There were hollows under his eyes. He looked thin. Poor boy! He had had an awfully hard time. And he had fought for her. He had risked his life for her. Certainly she owed him a good deal—everything, in fact. And here she couldn't even find sufficient courage to thank him. As though thanks, empty thanks, could possibly be adequate. Sally Jane was right. She was a coward. And proud. Especially proud. She shivered.

Suddenly Billy pulled his hat forward and picked up his reins. She saw his heel move. The horse began to turn. It was then that something snapped in Hazel's breast. Strength came to her shaking knees. She sprang to her feet, ran to the door, flung it open and dashed out. Billy's startled horse shied away. Billy dragged him back with a jerk.

Six feet from the horse Hazel stopped and stood very straight, her arms stiff at her sides. Her knees began to shake again. She knew that her voice would tremble. It did. "Bill, I—I've changed my mind. I was wrong. I—you—you did the right thing to see it through. If—if you hadn't, I don't know what would have become of me."

Then, of a sudden, he was off his horse, his arms were around her, and she knew that all her troubles were over.

THE END



Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

Years ago, when Weber and Fields were the owners and chief entertainers in a New York theatre that was famous the world over, we heard a joke there that we have always remembered:

Weber: Suppose you were walking down the street and you saw a man fall out of a window, what would you call it?

Fields: An accident.

Weber: Suppose the very next day you saw the same man fall out of the same window, what would you call it?'

Fields: A coincidence.

Weber: And suppose the third day you saw the same man again fall out of the same window, what would you call it?"

Fields: A darned *bad habit.*

The moral of this story is the moral of what follows. We have received so many letters praising the new size and the new policy of Everybody's that we cannot print them all in one number, and if we spread them over several numbers, we would be in danger of forming a bad habit. Therefore we are picking out a few at random. And as an extra precaution against falling into evil ways, we are going to give you the derogatory as well as the laudatory comments.

Illinois Lady: The story by Walter De Leon "got" this family; "Cambodia" good reading; "Wax Cylinder" holds you to end; the Chestnut Tree is yielding fresh nuts. And now may I ask: Is Everybody's owned body and soul by Englishmen? It reads very much like it, "don't cher know."

We applaud the lady for liking what she likes and for the charming way in which she makes a punch seem like a caress. She's a real, enduring friend.

Washington Reader: Have been reading Everybody's since it began and believe last two are best ever, can't be beat.

Rhode Island: Wish to express my great satisfaction at the sensible change in form. I don't quite approve an all-fiction magazine; one gets tired of being only amused.

This is a justifiable, off-hand criticism, but if "Rhode Island" will watch Everybody's, we think he will find in it fiction that does more than amuse. We hope he will find stories that are informative and stimulating.

Canada: I bought your magazine on chance, and it so happened that "If Winter Comes" was just beginning. I liked the story so well that I kept taking the magazine. I am going to like "The Rider of Golden Bar" just as much, though it is a story of a different kind.

"If Winter Comes" was by A. S. M. Hutchinson, an Englishman; "The Rider of Golden Bar" by William Patterson White, an American. "Canada" not only likes her own but her neighbor as well. "Illinois Lady," please take notice. And to "Canada": We expect to have another story by Mr. Hutchinson.

Kentucky: Congratulations on the new size and the all-fiction idea. Thought every story in August number good.

New York: If you will compare July Everybody's with former numbers, you are certainly of a delightful disposition if you expect praise for the change.

All inquiries concerning editor's disposition respectfully referred to Mrs. Editor.

Same New Yorker: When you made the former change [from small-size to large-size book], I was some time in getting used to it and never liked the awkward shape. Now that you have changed back to handier form, I see nothing to praise.

And to think we have always believed that New York liked changes!

NEW YORK (with delightful disposition): I think without exception you publish the best fiction of any magazine.

MICHIGAN (a cool breeze): I like neither new size nor new dress. Contents not as satisfactory as in past numbers, in my opinion.

NEW YORK (one who apparently likes changes): I write that you may know how much I enjoy EVERYBODY'S. July number specially fine. Please continue in well-doing.

A MEMBER of the Chimney Corner family has put this question: "Do you like editing?" We did like editing until—

In your July number (a New York reader writes) you publish a story called "Thalassa! Thalassa!" To explain the title, you quote a translation from the Anabasis, Book IV, Chapter VII, including the words: "Thalassa, Thalassa!" May I call your attention to that passage—Section 24 of the above-mentioned Book IV, Chapter VII? It reads, in the standard texts as follows:

". . . kaì táxa de ákaúousi boónton ton stratioton Thálatta, Thálatta, kaì paregguonton."

The Anabasis is written in as pure Attic Greek as any text extant, and again and again the word for the sea is spelled with two "t's" instead of the two "s's," which would be the Homeric or Herodotic dialect. This misuse and misquotation would probably have gone unnoticed but for your careful insertion of what purported to be a translation of that passage, further reenforced with a word impossible to find in a correct Attic text.

And the Greek scholar, after playing Dempsey to EVERYBODY'S Carpentier and jabbing everything about the new magazine, gently continues:

I presume I shall go right along reading EVERYBODY'S, as I am a confirmed magazine-reader; only, I am just as confirmed a writer-to-the-editor and I am said to wield a mean typewriter. Good luck to you—I am not always knocking.

Do we like editing? Huh! Do we like Greek?

When we related the foregoing to our friend, he was not sympathetic. He dug down into the vinegar-jar and brought forth this: "Why is an editor?" We could never give a particularly good reason for the animal until we received this:

I am writing as the representative of a band of women of western Pennsylvania to request you to give us henceforth nothing but *clean stories, clean pictures and clean jokes.* We will not pay for reading-matter that we are ashamed to say we have read, and that we dare not read aloud before our boys and girls lest we come to profanity and to things in the lives of the characters that would bar them from our homes as associates.

Women that smoke and swear and have no sense of modesty are not what we want set before our sons and daughters at any age. Certainly we can drop our subscription, but what of the thousands who feed on whatever they find without power to protest? Are not you and we responsible for them?

TO OUR friend who asks embarrassing questions we proudly-loudly answer:

An editor is because a universal laundry is needed. He's to keep everything and everybody clean.

And he's to deprive women of profanity and cigarets, despite the fact that he is smoking a cigaret and swearing at the heat while writing. According to rumor, charity is supposed to begin at home.

And also an editor is because somebody must be responsible for "the thousands who feed on whatever they find without power to protest."

ANOTHER sympathetic member of the Chimney Corner circle, who knows the way to the editor's heart, writes,

Can you print the enclosed rime in your Chimney Corner anonymously?

Here it is, with our ungrudging approval:

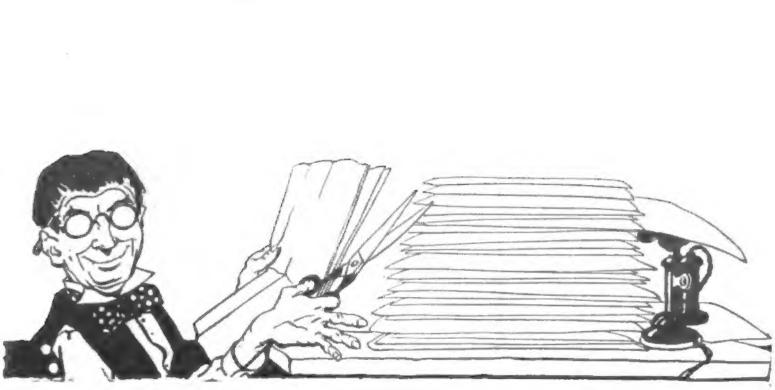
Does the illustrator ever, by the very merest chance,
Read the stories that he pictures; does he e'er give them a glance?
I've had leisure for much reading, stories short and stories long,
Yet they oft would disappoint me, for the pictures were all wrong!

Once a blind man lost his glasses. How I shared his pains and woes
Till I saw him in the picture with those glasses on his nose!
And four girls, all young and lovely, on the porch were having tea.
Why the five girls in the picture? That indeed's a mystery.

Then a captive in thick stockings hoped he could his captors lose.
But the picture? Oh, my goodness! Why the man still wore his shoes!
Though they run into the thousands, to tell all there is no need,
But I'd like to ask the artists if it's true they cannot read?

AND so it goes. An editor's life is just one lovely round of bouquets and—"pokequets." Fortunately for us—and the publishers—the bouquets are leading at the present moment by a score of ten to one.

SEWELL HAGGARD.



Prose or Worse *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

Classified adv.: *"Salesman wanted, with skirt following."* *(Reversing the practise.)*

Notice of tax collector, Siskiyou Co., Calif.: *"All dogs after the 17th day of March, is subject to death if he does not wear a license tag."*

In a Kansas undertaker's shop: *"Leave your orders for coal here."* *(Merely as a matter of taking enough fuel with you.)*

In Dixon, Ill.: *"Wanted, Saturday, boys to pull weeds not less than 15 years old."*

In Trafalgar Square, London: *"Anderson, Anderson & Anderson, Limited."*

In a Memphis movie: *"Young children must have parents."*

In a Chicago barber shop: *"During alterations patrons will be shaved in the back."*

In Chicago: *"To be disposed of, a mail-wagon, property of a gentleman with removable head-piece as good as new."*

(West Salem, Ill., Advocate)

The fire-engine has been moved from the north side of the square to Rev. D. M. Durham's barn, at the rear of the Christian parsonage lot, where it can be found in case it is needed.

Where the Revs believe in fighting hell with fire-drenchers.

(Deer Park, Wash., Journal)

The killing of Birdeen Peterson, aged 24, by Miss Olga Aagetvedt, age 21, at Stanwood last week was accidental, a coroner's jury found. She shot herself and took poison and has recovered.

Better luck next time, Olga.

(Omaha Bee)

A daughter was born to Mr. and Mrs. C. T. Olson and a son to Mr. and Mrs. Fred Rasmussen last week, at a birthday dinner last Thursday evening. Covers were laid for eight guests.

Oh, it just spoils a dinner to have so many rsvps.

(Davenport Times)

WANTED—Man to bore well. Call 212 17th Ave., Moline.

Oh, try any barber.

(British Officer's instructions to his men)

Your rifle is your best friend. Take the best care of it. Treat it as you would your wife. Rub it every day with an oily rag.

Yes; but be careful not to rub 'em the wrong way.

(Rochester, Minn., Bulletin)

One feature of the business, bad enough as it was, was that what wind there was, was coming from the quarter in which it did.

Yes; hain't it?

(Bureau County Record)

The bride and groom descended the stairway, their path dividing as they passed the pastor, Rev. J. H. Pierce, in whom still remained the words that would make them husband and wife.

Such an inconsiderate pastor!

(Adv. in Chicago Tribune)

Partner wanted—Exp. fisherman with nets. I have boat.

Formerly it took 3 to furnish complete equipment.

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(Sullivan, Ind., Union)

I lost my trousers Friday evening, somewhere between J. F. Douthitt's store on North side and law office, while the thermometer was hovering around the zero-mark. Will pay liberal reward for their return if the cold weather continues. Gilbert Gambill.

Finder, be kind; or Nature, be kinder.

(Pea Ridge Pod)

Oliver Warren of Ozone, who recently made a trip to Mission, Texas, with the intention of locating there, is back again. He writes me, "These old hills look better than ever to me." The fact that Miss Addie is still living on the other side of the gulch, of course, has nothing to do with it.

Whadderyermean, "old hills"?

(From a fifth-grade composition on Lincoln)

After the war Lincoln went to the theatre, and while he was looking at pictures he was shot.

Well, if he had to look at some that are being shown to-day, I could understand it.

(Seattle Times)

Wife in hospital and must sacrifice my 1919 six-cylinder ——; good condition; new tires; two extras.

He saved the car.

(Whitehall, Mich., Forum)

Ed. Rogers attended the automobile show in Grand Rapids last week and while there purchased a span of horses.

Of two evils——

(In Freeport, Ill.)

To Waitress: Please bring me the sugar.
Waitress: Plug or fine cut?

Oh, just as you chews.

(Springfield, Ohio, News-Record)

FORMER Resident Buried; Death Expected.

That's all right, if you know Springfield.

(Received by a music house)

Gentlemen: Please send me your complete catalog of samples cornet parts. Could you furnish me a couple pieces that's very effective and full of sorrow for the cornet? If so please send prices on same. I'd like to get the saddest to be had. Yours truly, etc.

Send him "How dry I am!"

(Greencastle, Ind., Banner)

J. G. Britton, wife and Nannie Britton got their feet under G. F. Swaim's table Sunday. Thanks to that old hen.

Whadderyermean, old hen?

(Greencastle, Ind., Banner)

We had the hardest storm Friday that ever has been down here. It blew down trees that were never blown down before.

The first hundred trees are the hardest.

(Bloomington, Ill., Pantagraph)

"Of all Sad words—"

Mrs. Julia Skinner of East Jefferson Street was much surprised yesterday to have her daughter, Mrs. Charles F. Wheeler, of Wilmington, Delaware, come walking in on her.

She bade me step in and shut the door on the baby.

—— reported that his brother-in-law had been eatin' offa him for two years.

Graham Marr, late of the Architects Guild, now baritone with the Boston Opera Company.

Drawing good houses?

(New Glasgow, N. S., Enterprise)

And then when comes the smell of flowers, and the tread of soft steps, and the crushing of the hearse's wheels in the gravel out in front of my place make the ceremony short and the epitaph simply:

For Sale—A Jersey cow. Will freshen in April. M. R. McDonald, Lourdes.

Please keep off the grass.

(HOW DO THEY *do* IT; HOW DO THEY DO IT?)

Ainslie's Magazine—"She forced his lips to her own and spoke softly into them."

The Red Button—"'Not to you,' replied Rosalie La Grange, dimpling on him."

From Tourgée's "A Fool's Errand"—"Carpetbagger! They hissed the name with lips hot with hate."

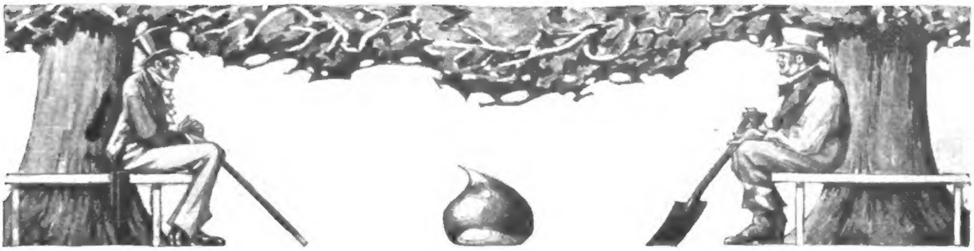
Saturday Evening Post—"He jerked an eye over his shoulder."

Joseph Conrad's "'Twixt Land and Sea"—"She leaned forward, hugging herself with crossed legs."

Will Irwin—"His eye clutched at the desk."

Harper's Magazine—"She dug her wrists into the deep sockets of her eyes. Blurred by the gesture, she saw him only dimly."

Smart Set—"'Fool! Cry out once more and we are lost,' he hissed. 'The Baron will not see him,' hissed the other. 'Ah, you have your future, but I'—she gulped—'what of me?'"



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

Editor's Note: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped, addressed envelope.

THE chief executive of one of the middle states was down in the timber-lands of southern Mississippi with a few friends on a hunting trip not long ago. The party found more mosquitoes than anything else, and finally, stung to desperation and exasperated by the guide's indifference to the pests, the governor turned to him with a not very polite query as to how he stood "these infernal mosquitoes."

"Mosquitoes?" said the guide. "Why Colonel, there ain't a mosquito among 'em. Them's gnats."

"I'll give you ten dollars if you will lie down on that log with your back bared and stay there for ten minutes," said the governor.

Soon seeing that he would lose the ten, the governor winked at one of his friends, and produced a small sun-glass, which he focused on a spot between the shoulders of the prostrate man.

In a few minutes the muscles on the guide's back began to twitch just a little, then he began to squirm. Finally he raised his head from his arms and said, sort of wistfully,

"Say, Colonel, does wassups count?"

SOME city friends took a country fiddler to hear Fritz Kreisler at a symphony concert. The great violinist's first number was a rhapsody, full of sudden starts, unexpected stops and lightning scales. The old fiddler listened with terrible intensity from beginning to end. "By gum," he exclaimed at its conclusion, "that feller's goin' to be a slick un atter he gets tuned up."

LITTLE ALICE, aged three, was making her first trip on the big ferry-boat. She was standing on the seat looking out of the window, watching the mighty ships pass up and down the river—a wonderful sight for her.

"Can you walk on the water, mother?" she suddenly demanded.

"No, Alice, mother can not walk on the water."

"Can daddy walk on the water, mother."

Mother smiled and replied, "Of course not, sweetheart, daddy couldn't walk on the water."

Knitting her brows the little tot thought a moment and then asked, "Can God walk on the water, mother."

"Yes, Alice, God can walk on the water."

"Well, then, I just guess my daddy can too."

THE late General Taylor, editor of the Boston *Globe*, once sent a reporter to a town on Cape Cod to get the story of a woman evangelist who had been greatly talked about. The reporter attended one of her meetings and occupied a front seat. When those who wished to be saved were asked to arise, he kept his seat and used his notebook. The evangelist approached and, taking him by the hand, said, "Come to Jesus."

"Madam," answered the newspaper man, "I'm here solely on business—to report your work."

"Brother," said she, "there is no business so important as God's."

"Well, maybe not," said the reporter; "but you don't know Charles H. Taylor."

WILLIAM LAWRENCE, Bishop of Massachusetts, told this story at a recent reunion of the class of '71, at Harvard College:

"Once when there was a vacancy in the Massachusetts bishopric, Phillips Brooks was the most likely candidate. I was walking with President Eliot one day and, in the course of conversation, I said to him, 'Do you think Brooks will be elected?'

" 'Well, no,' said Dr. Eliot, 'a second- or third-rate man would do as well.'

"Phillips Brooks was elected and a short time afterward Dr. Eliot and I were walking again. 'Glad Brooks was elected, aren't you?' I asked.

" 'I suppose so,' returned Dr. Eliot, 'but to tell the truth, William, you were my man.' "

A COUNTRY schoolma'am was examining her pupils for the benefit of the members of the school-board. The youngsters went through their paces nervously and did fairly well until the teacher asked the question, "Who wrote Hamlet?" There was a lull of exhaustion and no one answered. She asked again and this time a bit more sternly. "Who wrote Hamlet?"

Little Johnny Jones piped up defensively, "Please, teacher, I didn't."

"Ha ha!" Director Blank chuckled aloud. "The little skeesicks! I'll bet he did."

TWO Irishmen had a fight. During the scrimmage Pat lost his glass eye. Terry became frightened and stopped fighting. Picking up the pieces he handed them to Pat, saying, "Sure Pat, an' I didn't know ye wore a thing like that or I wouldn't 'a' hit ye."

"Oh, begorra, an' don't be worrin' about a thing like that, Terry," replied Pat. "Sure an' I couldn't see very well out o' the thing annyhow."

MOSE, an inhabitant of the backwoods, had, upon making a trip to the city, decided to take dinner at a café. Upon inspecting the menu, Mose's eye fell upon the item, "French fried potatoes," and, to satisfy his curiosity, ordered some.

After having partaken of a portion of his order, the dusky backwoodsman remarked, "Huh! This yere-all don't taste to me like nuthin' but plain 'Nited States spuds!"

THE conductor pulled up his Fifth Avenue 'bus at Thirty-fourth Street, and the ladies bound for the shopping district eagerly got out. But one fat lady who had been sitting on top came down the steep and winding stairs very slowly. Her skirts flapped round her ankles, and at every step she stopped and carefully pushed them down. The conductor waited with a bored expression, his hand on the bell-rope; but he lost patience when the fat lady stopped for the fifth time to thrust down her billowing draperies.

"Now, then, lady, hurry up, can't yer?" he burst out angrily. "Legs ain't no treat to me these days!"

WHEN Savannah was making a bid for the Shriners' Convention, she had no more enthusiastic supporter than Judge Peter W. Meldrim, Chief Justice Taft's successor as president of the American-Bar Association. An Atlanta supporter protested.

"Why you know, Judge," said he, "Savannah couldn't take care of the crowds. Even by putting cots in the halls, parlors and dining-rooms of the hotels there wouldn't be beds enough."

"Beds!" echoed the genial Meldrim. "why, sir, Savannah would make her visitors have such a thundering good time that no gentleman would even think of going to bed!"

AN ENTERPRISING Jap, student at one of America's inland colleges, who landed here with practically no English in his vocabulary, secured a job on a farm during the vacation season. He assimilated the language readily enough and soon had a workable command of words—enough to get by with; but the feminine nouns properly applicable to the various domestic animals came near proving a German Marne. One morning he came running in very great haste to the master of the house, gasping as he ran,

"Please, honorable Boss, come quickly—hen-pig, she have pups!"

LUCY heard her mother and some callers discussing a neighbor's rug. She quietly slipped out of the room, rang the neighbor's door-bell, and asked to see the new rug.

After looking at it for some time, she solemnly said, "Well, it doesn't make me sick."